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*In the loving memory of our
Founding Editor **Ananta Charan Sukla** (1942-2020)
on his 80th Birth Anniversary*

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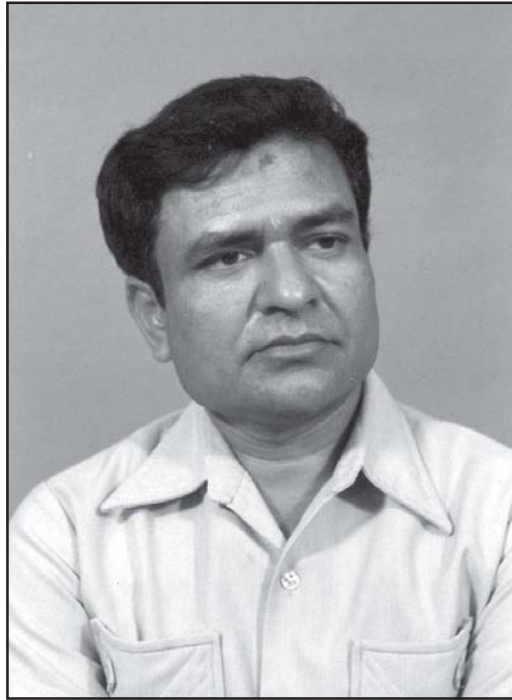
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Tracing Distortion, Disoriented Reality and Berkeley's Metaphysics in *Hamlet* and Beckett's Plays: Aesthetic Perspectives

ROHIT MAJUMDAR

Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I am a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it! You know, I just...do things.

The Joker – Heath Ledger – *Dark Knight* 2008

Abstract: The conundrum between *chaos* and *order*, *distortion* and *congruity* have a synchronicity of its own. Perceptual reality does not entertain binary opposites because there are none. It asks potent questions: Is the perception of our world around us a personal experience or is it impersonal? Is the *absurd* incongruous or another order that baffles the conservative mind? Is not every conformist structure a distortion of another, earlier structure? Art and literature, especially theatre and films are witness to life, a domino effect that has a mind of its own. The end is where the beginning is – a brilliantly used philosophy plays deeply within the microcosm of Beckett's paradoxical universe – *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* remain as the true testament of the distortion. To say that distortion is an order on its own, then, becomes the fulcrum, where absurd is but the *Other* that gives theatre, its own semiotic identity is in an equilibrium. Among many, one of the further evident indices of the transition from structuralism to post- structuralism, is the route whereby a unified practice has dispersed into a plurality of theoretical styles.

Keywords: Aesthetics, *Theatre of the Absurd*, *Hamlet*, *Berkeley's Metaphysics*, Samuel Beckett, Existentialism

Introduction

Theatrical Solution to Antinomies of Logicity – Transformation

All our apparatuses of knowledge and discourse – philosophy and science – are observations, personal or impersonal, of the domino effect of transformation. This paper will investigate solutions to such antinomies, the paradoxes, to which dramatic creation and absurdist traditions of theatre have tried doing justice, especially to the metamorphosis from the material to the immaterial – real to virtual and then to real in the suspended disbelief of cognitive functions. One as unpredictable as Joker, as quoted above, is most predictable in that trait that he is unpredictable. But no one wishes to face the brunt of it, except in the creative context, the imaginative *Physiologicity*¹ (a morphed word from *physiology*).

Art is an interesting but baffling experience, and it is no wonder that puzzling, often contradictory, statements are made about it. It is believed that theatre and the arts originate in personal emotions. In real life, these emotions are subject to inhibitions and express themselves in violent, sporadic outbursts. There is no lack of intensity, but the expression is confused and ill-organized. Art

supplies man with its own vehicle of expression, which is different from the modes used in life. It is true that in real life we do not paint or sing our emotions. Although it is true that we express them in words, the medium used by the playwright or the playwright, it is quite different from the halting speech of everyday life to the special language of theatre.

Theatre and the arts, therefore, are expressions of recollected emotions, of emotions contemplated from a distance. The theatre of pain does not give us pain as it is felt but of pain as imaginatively surveyed. Can we then say that it is an expression of sympathy with pain? Such a description would be misleading, because sympathy with pain is an ordinary human emotion and its normal expression would be as undramatic as the expression of pain itself. The theatre of pain has the urgency of pain but also the aloofness of sympathy for sympathy with pain. The antinomy between the personal and the impersonal features of art may resolve if we relate it to the union of form and content. The content of art constitutes personal emotions and personal ideas, but once it is endowed with form, it acquires a life of its own and the artist is only a spectator of the emotions once felt in real life. When Eric Clapton lost his son, he felt deeply as a father, but when this emotion took shape in the poem *Tears in Heaven*,² although his emotion retained its old personal warmth, his playwright imagination also removed it from the sphere of personal agony and transformed it into an idealized experience. Within this assortment Marxism and psychoanalysis are, along with deconstructionism, the two most important threads. Both are anxious to challenge the idealist notion of the subject – i.e., the subject as centered, essentially conscious, and ‘free’ in the sense that it pre-exists as social or other purposes. Structuralism itself, of course, also discards such a conception of the subject, and in its firmness on the decisive role of language-like structures offers a basis for a materialist theory of subjectivity. But the Saussurean assessment of the “sign” in practice reinstates a diverse form of idealism, as Coward and Ellis argue in their *Language and Materialism*; a genuinely materialist account of the subject must break out of the confines of a ‘pure’ linguistics-based structuralism, and the Marxist and psychoanalytic viewpoints are above all ways of doing this. Equally, however, structuralism has undoubtedly forced Marxism and psychoanalysis to rethink some of their basic doctrines in a rigorous and productive way; as Robert Young puts it in his introduction to *Untying the Text*, post-structuralism would not have been possible without structuralism. Precisely, the theoretical developments that Lacan has introduced into psychoanalysis and Althusser into Marxism are both heavily predisposed by, and extremely critical of, structuralism.

1. The Aesthetic Solution to Antinomies of Logicity

1.1. *Universal Forms*

As art is both personal and impersonal, it is also both individual and universal. The individuality of a work of art is easy to understand; every work of art is distinctive because it has a form which is not like the form of any other work of art, however similar the basic ideas might be. Fables all over the world teach the same lessons, but every fable has its unique form, and that is why fables have a deathless appeal. Cézanne³ drew portraits of himself; but each of these portraits is a unique product, because each has its own form, and each expresses a peculiar mood. We love characters in a drama or a novel only when we feel that they have an individual life, and one person does not talk or behave as any other person would do, and if Shakespeare is greater than other writers, it is primarily because of this individuality of portraiture.

However, this is not the entire truth. If art consisted only of individual forms, it would not have been possible for any reader or spectator to pass into and personify with it. It may be profitable here to examine, once again, the nature of this aesthetic identification. How does the playwright merge in the experience or the reader with the playwright’s theatre? This identification which is at the same time nearer and more distant than sympathy is primarily *empathy* or feeling into the form of a thing. Herbert Reed illustrates empathy by saying that a spectator with an open mind looking into

the Japanese print the great wave by Katsushika Hokusai will be absorbed by the sweep of the enormous wave, its upswelling movement rather than think of the poor men in the boats and their danger. "When," says he, "we feel sympathy for the afflicted, we reenact in ourselves the feelings of others; when we contemplate a work of art, we project ourselves into the form of a work of art, and our feelings are determined by what we find there, by the dimensions we occupy".⁴ It is to be seen that even if we accept the theory of empathy, we must recognize an element of universality in art, for it would not be possible for us to project ourselves into the form of a work of art unless there were a universal element in it. We should be able to appreciate the enormous sweep of the great wave, if only we have an idea of enormousness, and the suggestion is apparent that Hokusai's print will have a larger appeal for those who have seen the upswelling movement of a great wave than for those who have no experience of the sea.

These are the great commonplaces or the archetypal patterns or the primary and basic emotions. Because we are all stirred by these emotions, we shall be interested in all the devious ways of expressing them. We are interested in the expressions of these emotions in real life, too. But in real life an Othello is just a jealous man, a Macbeth is just a criminally ambitious general. Why is it that all such characters of art and theatre are more gripping than such characters in real life? Even if we do not admit that art is more restful than life, we must concede that it appeals in an unusual, *absurd* way.

The answer to this *absurdity* is found in the symbolical character of art. Art expresses an idea on a plane of reality different from that to which it belonged, and that is why art can eschew or transform all that is accidental and of merely local and temporary importance; it can also add much that will help to reveal the idea in all its distinctness and purity. As far as Shakespeare composed Hamlet for a particular company and a particular audience, Hamlet had to be fat because Burbage was fat. But Burbage's corpulence has nothing to do with Hamlet as ideally conceived by Shakespeare, and for us the line "he is fat and scant of breath"⁵ is significant only as showing Gertrude's excitement and anxiety which are striking contrast to the criminality of her second husband. It is in this way that an individual peculiarity of a particular actor has been promoted to the region of universal forms.

1.2. *Distortion and Assimilation*

Succeeding from the above argument and its conclusion, the following arguments present one final antinomy left to discuss: is art and theatre self-expression or do they also imply communication for others? When the playwright publishes a work or the painter invites other people to see paintings or the musician puts down the notes for performers, each think of an audience and expects reward and appreciation. But when these artists see their visions, do they think of the public or is self-expression and end in itself? Art is the most intimate expression of the artist's personality, and is a process of dislocation, distortion, assimilation, and assimilation through distortion of the natural order to create a new assimilation into the imaginative realm. The artist retires into an inner sanctum and is seldom anxious to prove the truth of the visions with reference to facts or laws. If this intimacy or privacy is gone, art would lose both its intensity and its directness. Artistic activity has its origin in the spiritual necessity for intimate self-expression, followed by the artist drawing pictures, painting, or singing songs or carvings or builds with appropriate materials. This later activity stands apart from the primary artistic activity by its volitional character, and it can be called artistic only metaphorically. But in this view the true work of art is over as soon as the artist's intuitions mushroom in the brain.

The above theory seems at first sight to be unobjectionable, or it is the expression of the deepest impulses in the artist's soul and the fact that others are pleased with the work or that the artist wins wealth is a mere accident. Although the artist's emotions and ideas are personal and although the artist may feel the creative urge as primarily and impulse to self-expression, the artist can achieve aesthetic excellence only when the artist not merely feels emotions or things out thoughts but contemplates them as a vision. In other words, all artistic activity involves the process of distancing (a

form of alienation), and its chief characteristic is a combination of intensive apprehension and placid detachment. It is only when the painter or the sculptor is also a beholder or the playwright the reader of his own creation that creative activity can begin. The content of art consists of emotions and ideas that the artist feels or thinks uniquely, and they are derived from the artist's contact with the world, and thus the audience enters the work of an artist and becomes potentially communicable.

2. Hamlet's Insanity Defense through the premise of Disoriented Reality

2.1. Sigmund Freud and the Oedipal Witness Box

It is improbable and quite oblique to assume that we are copiously in the jurisdiction of what we say or that readers are copiously in control of their reactions. We cannot deduce that our intended significances will be conveyed, or that our conscious purposes represent our exact intentions. Neither can we deduce that language is an apparent medium of communication, of either thought or emotion. Freud was aware of the problematic nature of language itself, its imperviousness and materiality, its resistance to clarity and its refusal to be reduced to any mono-dimensional "literal" significance. His own works comprise many literary references, and some of his major concepts, such as the Oedipus complex, were initiated on literary works such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*. Freud's own literary analyses incline to relate his *prototypes* of dream interpretation to literary texts, viewing the latter as manifestations of wish fulfillment and flattering projections of the ego of an author. Ensuing psychologists and literary critics, developing Freud's ideas, have protracted the field of psychoanalytic criticism to encompass: analysis of the motives of an author, of readers and fictional characters, involving a text to features of the author's biography such as childhood memories, relationship to parents; the nature of the creative process; the psychology of reader's reactions to literary texts; interpretation of symbols in a text, to unearth covert significances; exploration of the connections between various authors in a literary tradition; investigation of gender roles and stereotypes; and the functioning of language in the structure of the conscious and unconscious. What motivates nearly all these accomplishments is the perception of a broad analogy, promoted by Freud himself, between the psychoanalytic route and the production of a narrative. In a sense, the psychoanalyst himself creates a fiction: prompted by a patient's neurosis and recollection of traumatic events, the psychoanalyst creates a rational narrative about the patient within which the traumatic event can take its place and be understood.

It is even remotely unfathomable to extent Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) must have snubbed the empiricist and positivist scholarships of its time. Although in part based on physiological mockups of streams and blockages (images that later find a literary equal in the modernist 'stream-of-consciousness' practice), it also aligned the incipient discipline with contemporaneous vogues, such as spiritualism and mysticism, and openly affirmed its debt to storytelling and literary analysis. For motives that have no palpable therapeutic purpose, he designates the temporality of dreams and the origins of their 'timeless' quality as *condensation* and *displacement*. The linguist Roman Jakobson picks up on these footings in his essay '*Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances*' (1956) and associates them with metaphor and metonymy.⁶ The reckoning has since become undisputed in structural literary analysis. Lionel Trilling identified this connection as early as 1947, when he appealed that "[t]he Freudian psychology makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind" and called psychoanalysis 'a science of tropes, of metaphor and its variants, synecdoche, and metonymy'.⁷

The aesthetic outcome of 'timelessness' in turn became another literary idyllic and shaped the innovation of W. B. Yeats, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

More than postulating a structural link between the psyche and poetics, Freud's experiment also outlined a complex model of interpretation. On the one hand, dream interpretation as well as case studies followed the customary hermeneutic surface–depth model. It assumes that under the layer of

images or narrative a “true meaning” can be decrypted. More awkwardly, reductive readings of Freud introduced, via the soon disseminated ‘Freudian symbols’, an almost exclusive absorption of interpretation on the personal conflicts of the author and a set an outline of libidinal frustrations. Its general shape is outlined in Freud’s essay ‘Repression’ (1915). While the number of Freudian-inspired analyses of literature is now impossible to assess, some texts have become particularly prominent objects, and some readings especially influential. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* can accordingly be read as an incestuous oedipal return to the mother.

The most fecund place for a Freudian construing, however, has undoubtedly been Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* – a celebrated early specimen is Ernest Jones’ study *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949).⁸ In their extreme forms, simplistic submissions of Freudian notions have led to tactics that regard all creative activity as the result of psychological disturbance, a compensation for deficient or anomalous fulfilment of libidinal urges. Freud’s libidinal idyllic is genital heterosexual sexuality, while deviations lead to narcissism, fetishism, homosexuality, etc. He pursues this squabble in some of his essays on art and literature, for example his studies of Leonardo da Vinci and Dostoevsky. While Freud is vigilant not to make assertions about an ‘essence’ of art, he designates the artist as someone who has finalized what is daydreaming for ordinary people. This prolific engagement of repression is called sublimation. It is regarded as the source of most ethnic productions.⁹ What the psychoanalyst can ensure is quantifying together the various components of an artist’s life and his works, and to compose from these the artists’ mental establishment and his visceral impulses. Freud directed such an analysis of Leonardo da Vinci’s depiction of *The Madonna and Child with St. Anne* (1910). His lengthy scrutiny of Leonardo da Vinci’s personality generated a prototype for psychoanalytic biography. He wrote a psychoanalytic justification of the novella *Gradiva* by the German author Wilhelm Jensen, as well as psychological readings of other works. In 1914 he published (anonymously) an acute interpretation of the “meaning” of Michelangelo’s statue of Moses in Rome. Anyhow his own readings of literary and artistic texts, Freud never demanded that psychoanalysis could adequately elucidate the process of artistic creation. In his manuscript “Dostoevsky and Parricide” (1928), he stated: “Before the problem of the creative artist exploration must, alas, lay down its arms.”¹⁰

2.2. Jacques Lacan and the Narcissistic Mirror

In 1953, at a psychoanalytic symposium in Rome, Lacan gave a paper (usually known as the “Rome speech”) delineating his rebellious position vis-a-vis conventional psychoanalysis and putting forward for the first time his theses on the centrality of language. Language is to be assumed here both in the ordinary sense of verbal communiqué – particularly, for him, as this befalls between analyst and patient – and in the broader Structuralist sense of Levi-Strauss’ “symbolic function”. In the Rome speech, Lacan uses a very Levi-Straussian view of the unconscious; well ahead, as we shall see, this advances rather inversely. He also follows Levi-Strauss in assuming the concepts of structural linguistics for use in another turf – in his case, that of psychoanalysis. Here too, however, the unique ideas undergo substantial re-figuring. Lacan sees both the subject and the unconscious as more vibrant human constructs and is far more concerned than Levi-Strauss with the process of their production. This stress also adds a quasi-literary facet to his theory; his justification of the construction of the subject in language has itself, in its archetypal version, a certain ‘narrative’ form: it is the story of the causation of the subject, and Lacan does not oversight an occasion to point out its fictional and dramatic dimensions. The story has two instants of climax and/or crisis (although it must be stressed that in the life of any individual, these are not once-and-for-all events, but constantly recur in one form or another): the ‘mirror stage’ and the ‘entry into the Symbolic order’.

The model of the mirror stage, put forward in an important early paper in 1949, is rooted in Freud’s observation that the ego matures out of narcissism. Prior to this, the infant proficiencies himself as a fluid fusion of drives, of good and bad feelings, missing both unity and separateness, indistinguishable from the world around him and from the mother’s body. The moment at which he

comprehends that his doppelgänger in the mirror is in fact “himself” literally transforms him: for the first time, he sees himself as it were from the outside, as a totality, a distinct, unwavering entity – and he reacts, Lacan says, with ‘jubilation’. This narcissistic empathy with the image is what constitutes the ego, and it underlines the importance of vision in the child’s development. But in classifying with the mirror image, which is not only gratifyingly separate from the world around it but inexorably also separate from him as subject, he is constructing his identity on a fantasy – or, as Lacan also says, situating it “in a. fictional direction”; and the ego is thus constitutionally estranged from the subject. Also, the perfect couple formed by subject and image provides an ambiguous model for other dual associations and especially the child’s relation to his mother. The mirror stage inducts the Imaginary Order – that continuing dimension of the subject’s actuality which is bound up with the ego, the mother, estranging identifications of all kinds, and a largely visual mode of experience.

2.3. Deconstructing the Insanity Defense in Hamlet

A thorough understanding of psychoanalysis interpretation of literature and all the corresponding theories by analysts can be best made explicit by taking a literal example – Hamlet, a work on which both Freud and Lacan formulated their case. Freud’s own explanation of Hamlet centered on the “discovery”¹¹ of Hamlet’s Oedipal longing for his mother and the resultant guilt averting him from slaying the man who has done what he reflexively wanted to do. Lacan’s reading is not disparate to this but recasts it in terms of the position of the phallus in the portentous economy of the unconscious. This allows him to tie the central issue of Hamlet’s tardy action with other elements in the play: lamentation, fantasy, narcissism, and psychosis. The phallus figures in all of these, in a disconcerting variety of roles (“And the phallus is everywhere present in the disorder in which we find Hamlet each time he approaches one of the decisive moments of his action”, p. 49) which do not always seem attuned with each other; but this perhaps illustrates the nature of meanings as they multiply in the unconscious. The phallus, according to Lacan, is the signifier of unconscious desire – the longing of the Other.¹² It comes to undertake that role through the workings of the Oedipus complex. The child’s first desire is to be the object of the mother’s desire – i.e., to be the phallus that the mother lacks. The intervention of the Name-of-the-Father forces the child to give up this craving; to accept Symbolic castration, to repress the phallus, which thus becomes the unconscious signifier of this unique desire. As such, it comes to stand for all subsequent desires as well, and to replicate itself in chains of signifiers which metaphorically supernumerary for it.

The most potent question Shakespeare has been able to make enigmatic in the play – why is Hamlet unable to kill Claudius until he is dying himself? Lacan’s solution is in the first illustration that “man’s desire is the desire of the other”, and that Hamlet’s desire is deferred from, subject to, his mother’s desire for Claudius. He is forced in a sense to plea her desire, which is Claudius. But Lacan expands this further through two major facets of the Imaginary order: fantasy and narcissism. Fantasy denotes to the subject’s relation to an object of desire which is an Imaginary auxiliary for the Symbolic phallus – it is thus in some sense a “lure” or a deflection; and in Hamlet’s case it is also what deflects him, decoys him away from, his mission to avenge his father. The main make-believe entity, or “bait” (p. 11), is Ophelia, and Lacan analyses this at length, indicating to her phallic overtones in the text (p. 23); but the duel with Laertes – which Claudius organizes to “deflect”, in fact to get rid of, Hamlet – institutes another trap set on the level of the Imaginary. Hamlet’s unusually docile recognition of the gamble can only be explained, Lacan argues, by the logic of the mirror stage in which narcissism is inextricably guaranteed up with rivalry. That is, Hamlet identifies with Laertes as an ideal image of himself, and therefore (as already evident in their fight over Ophelia’s grave) sees him as a rival: “The ego ideal is . . . the one you have to kill” (p. 31).

The inmost and most concealed motive for Hamlet’s inaction is, however, a different kind of narcissism, and one that again concerns the phallus. As Lacan has said, the decline of the Oedipus complex entails in mourning the phallus; and, as in all mourning, its loss is compensated for in the

Imaginary register: by the formation of an image of the phallus which is narcissistically capitalized by the subject (pp. 48—9). And this is Lacan's final revelation — Claudius represents the phallus. So, to kill Claudius would be to commit suicide. But why is Claudius the phallus? Because he is the recipient of the mother's desire — but also because he has escaped scot-free from killing the father. The approbation triggers the phallus insecurity, the emotional unconscious suddenly sends latent signals of this insecurity to the academic mind of Hamlet. Hamlet looks for a flaw in the new nuptial, something that he assumes is contrived. Shakespeare may reflect, in Hamlet's philosophical mood, something beyond the resistance of the scholar to action, to assassinate, to involve in the words, under the well-portrayed supernatural enterprise. It is a psychic inhibition, fallibility, despair, and suffering that he cannot comprehend. He is torn asunder between his knowledge of perceptual judgement and that of a ghost and its narrative. But all knowledge derives by hypothetical reasoning from knowledge of external facts and previous knowledge.

Such is with Hamlet. His mind broods over such knowledge as to philosophize action. This incessant struggle between reason and action is reflective of Kant's *Theory of Practical Reason*. Within the pathologically affected will of the rational Hamlet we find a conflict of maxims with the practical laws created by himself. His rational reasoning is overshadowed by the ambition of a duty, which creates its own laws, and the process of adjustment is hindered thus. The influence of the supernatural on Hamlet's maxims and hitherto indecisive mind create imperatives of action, unsupported by his emotions, sobered by rational learning. Hamlet vows to suppress all his academic learning and take on the role of the primal avenger, but for that he knows he needs to put up an act, a mask of pseudo psychopathic schizophrenia — but with a personality of his own:

[...] How strange or odd so e'er I bear myself (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on),
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall— With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake, Or by
pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, [...]

The phrase “antic disposition” can be recast as manic depression or schizophrenic lunacy, something that Hamlet needs because his reasoning mind counters his primal instincts. The challenge to the phallus is met — Hamlet has found the necessary psychological anchors to take the fight to the initial defeat from his uncle, and even from Gertrude.

In other words, the difference between Oedipus Rex and Hamlet is that whereas Oedipus' crime of slaughtering his father and marrying his mother was punished by castration, Claudius' acting out of the Oedipal drama has left him uncastrated: the phallus is “still there... and it is precisely Claudius who is called upon to embody it” (p. 50, my italics). Lacan corroborates this connection further through the phallic implications of kingship, and claims that Hamlet's enigmatic statement: “The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body” makes profound sense if ‘phallus’ is substituted for ‘king’: “the body is bound up in this matter of the phallus — and how — but the phallus, on the contrary, is bound to nothing: it always slips through your fingers” (p. 52).

The fact that Hamlet says he is the foil (“I'll be your foil, Laertes”) which, as it turns out, kills both himself and Claudius aids to accentuate the final verity: it is only now of his own death, when the knowledge that he is dying releases him from all narcissistic attachments, that Hamlet is free to kill the king/phallus.

While we establish relations and literary links between literary scholarship and psychoanalytic theories, the argument was reopened, after what seems in retrospect as a retreat into either Structuralist or biographical positions, by the *Psychology and Literature* issue of *New Literary History* in 1980 and eventually the special 1990 edition of *The Oxford Literary Review*.¹³ Several compendiums that appeared during this period and since are listed in the bibliography below.

These enduring critical reassessments exhibit that psychoanalysis has persisted as a stumbling block and point of argument for literary and cultural theory in the late twentieth century. Yet they

also hint at the probable of psychoanalysis to offer a decisive and necessary link between disparate poststructuralist theories. It is aide-mémoire of the continual translations and transformations that happen in literary and cultural theories, their implicit and explicit desires, tensions, and frustrations. At the same time, by partly creating the object of critical investigation itself, psychoanalysis has avoided an unwarranted synchronization and homogenization that might have turned it into the super-theory that it never set out to be.

3. The Beckett Paradox

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* are traditionally associated with Sartre's *existentialism* in that they deny any inherent purpose to life. However, a careful reading of the two plays shows that they need not be read as despair-ridden and pessimistic. Aware of the potentially devastating implications of Sartre's philosophy, Beckett offers a way for humans to find essence by highlighting George Berkeley's *idealism*, in which nothing exists without being perceived. Through the repeated motif of perception, Beckett's plays include Berkeley's ideology, which holds that as recognized is at the heart of meaningful existence. The result is a 'Beckettian' synthesis between existentialism and idealism wherein humans, thrust into a world with no essence, construct significance through perceiving and being perceived. *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* suggest that though meaning may not be inherent in the world, our sense of self and happiness is irreducibly tied to the way we are acknowledged, and that we are empowered only when we are accepted by ourselves and others. In the postmodern world where ambition, technology, and chaos often leave one to retreat into self-imposed loneliness, Beckett's dramas convey that introspection and interdependence are at the crux of purposeful life:

I began to discover stage scenes in the most common-place everyday events. [One day I saw] a blind man begging; two girls went by without seeing him, singing: "I closed my eyes; it was marvelous!" This gave me the idea of showing on stage, as crudely and as visibly as possible, the loneliness of man, the absence of communication among human beings.¹⁴

In *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, both written in the 1950s, Samuel Beckett examines the emptiness of human existence, especially acute during the post-war era. His plays, which express the banality of life through meaningless repetitions, have been associated with existentialism in that they deny any inherent purpose to life. However, a careful reading of *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* reveals that Beckett's plays need not be interpreted as despair-ridden and pessimistic. A dialectical reading of the plays illustrates that Beckett offers a way for humans to find essence in life by showing his audience what *not* to do; in other words, by repeatedly exposing why his characters Vladimir, Estragon, and Krapp are unhappy, Beckett highlights their weakness and in turn suggests what one *should* do to overcome life's barrenness. Beckett's solution to existential despair derives from Berkeley's idealism in which nothing exists without being perceived. Beckett applies this ideology to the human psyche and dramatically conveys that although meaning may not be inherent in the world, humans can find essence in our relationships and interdependence:

The *Theatre of the Absurd* shows the world as an incomprehensible place. The spectators see the happenings on the stage entirely from the outside, without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events, as newly arrived visitors might watch life in a country of which they have not yet mastered the language.' The confrontation of the audience with characters and happenings which they are not quite able to comprehend makes it impossible for them to share the aspirations and emotions depicted in the play... Emotional identification with the characters is replaced by a puzzled, critical attention. For while the happenings on the stage are absurd, they yet remain recognizable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity, so that eventually the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence. Thus, the absurd and fantastic goings-on of the *Theatre of the Absurd* will, in the end, be found to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure.¹⁵

After the Second World War, Samuel Beckett played a significant role in shaping the literary movement that would later become known as postmodernism. Emerging from the horrors of genocide and destruction, writers struggled to make sense of the atrocities they had witnessed and were further disappointed by the new Cold War. The apparent lack of progress in history inspired postmodernists to express the bleak human prospect in their works. Molière reflected the transitory and incoherent nature of human existence in the Theatre of the Absurd, in which “men and women, as Shakespeare says, were viewed as mere actors in an absurd play, making their entrances and exits upon the stage of life and mouthing their tales ‘full of sound and fury,’ signifying nothing.”¹⁶

Among the most influential postmodern plays are Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Krapp's *Last Tape*, both closely associated with absurdism and existentialism. Noting the barren yet symbolic details of his works, the philosopher Alain Badiou describes Beckett as “a writer of the absurd, of despair, of empty skies, of incommunicability and of eternal solitude “ in sum, an existentialist.”¹⁷ Sartre's philosophy “ which argues there is no intrinsic meaning in human existence “ permeates *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. Considered the father of existentialism and a contemporary of Beckett, Sartre held that existence is prior to essence and that humans come into being without inherent significance. Existentialism thus “places the entire responsibility for [one's] existence squarely upon [one's] own shoulders.”¹⁸ Though Sartre himself did not necessarily intend his philosophy to be pessimistic, Beckett showed that the seeming meaninglessness of life could lead individuals into despair. The purposeless lives of Vladimir, Estragon, and Krapp epitomize the Sartrean individual who struggles to make sense of life's seeming insignificance.

The Sartrean existential struggle is apparent even from the first line of *Waiting for Godot*. The bare setting of “A country road. A tree. Evening” immediately conveys emptiness; roads and trees, which are conventional symbols of life, are barren, suggesting a lack of abundance. The use of participle “ the continuous and unfinished form of the verb “ in the title of the play is also significant because it suggests that nothing worthwhile happens in life as Vladimir and Estragon idly wait for Godot to appear.

Furthermore, the play opens with Estragon exclaiming that there is “nothing to be done,” in response to which Vladimir confesses, “I'm beginning to come round to that opinion.”¹⁹ There really is nothing to be done in a play in which two plain characters wait, passing the time with verbal and physical repertoire. There is no coherent story, point, or design in the play, and Vladimir and Estragon's lives are reduced to meaningless repetition and banter. In fact, the two characters even dismiss existence as a sort of a problem to be solved:

Vladimir: Suppose we repented. Estragon: Repented what?

Vladimir: Oh... We would not have to go to into the details.

Estragon: Our being born?²⁰

Being born becomes an occasion to repent for, as if existing is a sin, a fault, a regrettable fact. Vladimir also directly represents Sartre's notion of the universal individual, the idea that one man represents all of mankind because “in choosing for himself he chooses for all men.”²¹ For example, Vladimir convinces Estragon that they should help Lucky by claiming: “at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late!”²² Because one always chooses what one believes to be the best, each decision a person makes serves to define the ideal for all of humanity. In this way, not only does *Waiting for Godot* capture the boredom and insignificance of an existential life, but it also relays Sartre's sentiment that the choices individuals make necessarily affect everyone else.

Similarly, *Krapp's Last Tape* harkens to Sartrean existentialism with its mindless repetitions and lack of a traditional plot. It is interesting to note that the play is set in the future; though the play takes place in the late evening in the future (suggesting the end of time), Krapp possesses no intelligible sense of his past and thus fails to attribute meaning to his life. For instance, Krapp does not remember

his journal's contents when he rummages through them, even when they involve something as grave as his mother's death: "mother at rest at last.... Hm.... The black ball.... [*He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.*] Black ball?"²³ Krapp repeatedly raises his head and stares blankly into space in hopes of remembering, but his life, too, has been reduced to fragments of random and redundant moments that have lost significance. Krapp's life lacks any sense of progress since what he thought was most important in his past years "discoveries, thoughts, and philosophy" are no longer valuable to him. In fact, they torment him to the point where he cannot even stand to listen to them again. When the younger Krapp in the tape shares what sounds like an epiphany and reads, "what I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely—," Krapp angrily switches off the tape and curses as he fast-forwards through the next few minutes of the tape. He comments, "[I've] just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for 30 years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that."²⁴ Instead of leading a fulfilling life, Krapp has spent his time on earth in a meaningless acquisition of years, exemplifying Sartre's philosophy that life is inherently meaningless.

Despite Sartre's belief that existentialism is empowering because it allows one to freely determine one's own essence, Beckett recognized how dangerous an inherently meaningless life could be for the individual: Vladimir, Estragon, and Krapp are all unhappy. As such, Beckett employs strong currents of Berkeley's idealism in *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* to suggest a solution to the hopeless existential life. Building upon Sartre's notion of the universal individual, Beckett's plays endorse Berkeley's idea that one cannot exist happily on one's own because being recognized is at the heart of meaningful existence. Berkeley, an eighteenth-century idealist, famously argued that "*esse is percipi*": that to be is to be perceived.²⁵ He posited that everything in the realm of awareness "form, colors, texture, taste, etc." are ideas perceived by the senses and concluded that everything in the world, including individuals, exists only when acknowledged by a perceiving mind. When Berkeley wrote that "all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth have not any subsistence without a mind" and that "their being is to be perceived or known," he contended that nothing truly exists until perceived by a conscious mind.²⁶

When analyzed from a Berkeleian point-of-view, *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* show how life becomes reduced to a series of boring, meaningless, and fragmented moments when no one is really "looking." The plays reveal "a universe of insignificance, its tension created by the conflict between the insignificance and man's effort to give himself meaning despite everything."²⁷ However, difficulty arises when a man tries to give *himself* meaning; though Beckett may believe in the individual ability to determine essence, he suggests that we cannot conceive meaning on our own because we are relational beings.

One commentator agrees when he shares that "Beckett may be wishing to apply to mind Berkeley's notion of the relativity and dependency of the sensible object."²⁸ Vladimir, Estragon, and Krapp are all occupied with perception: they crave recognition and become depressed when they are deprived of it "this explains why Vladimir and Estragon endlessly wait for Godot and why Krapp only seems to recall people's eyes. Through the repeated motif of perception, Beckett provides a Berkeleian answer to the potentially devastating bleakness of existentialism. The result is a Beckettian redemptive existentialism in which our sense of self and happiness are constructed only when we are perceived, both by ourselves and others.

Evidence of Vladimir and Estragon's tireless desire for recognition pervades *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir repeatedly wakes up his sleeping friend until Estragon exclaims, "Why will you never let me sleep?" Vladimir simply answers, "I felt lonely,"²⁹ as if he cannot stand not being looked at even for a minute because he is afraid, he will cease to exist when no one is aware of him. Even Pozzo, an expert and therefore arguably the most powerful character in the play, repeatedly asks for attention when he utters, "is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? Will you look at me, pig!"³⁰ However, the correlation between being seen and existing becomes most clear when Vladimir converses with the Boy upon learning that Godot will not be coming that evening:

Boy: What am I to say to Mr. Godot, sir?

Vladimir: Tell him... [*he hesitates*] ... tell him you saw us. [*Pause*] You did see us, didn't you?³¹

Here, Vladimir and Estragon seek recognition from Godot before Godot arrives, and this exemplifies Beckett's synthesis of existentialism – the philosophy that existence precedes essence – and idealism – that to be is to be is to be perceived. A similar dialogue takes place when Vladimir learns once again that Godot will not be coming in Act II:

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, sir?

Vladimir: Tell him... [*he hesitates*] ... tell him you saw me and that... [*he hesitates*] ... that you saw me. [...] [*With sudden violence*] You're sure you saw me; you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!³²

There is a strong need for Vladimir to know that he had been seen; Berman explains that "[in Beckett's plays] minds become dependent, vulnerable beings; they need the support and comfort of being perceived."³³ Beckett's characters express their basic desire for acceptance through their obsession with being seen.

The Berkeleian "to be is to be perceived" axiom is also present in *Krapp's Last Tape* as Krapp ends his reclusive life in deep unhappiness. During the play, we learn that Krapp had been distancing himself from others because of his artistic ambitions. "As the tapes make clear," Gordon analyzes, "he has pursued the life of the mind, separating the 'grain' from the 'husks' following his 'vision' that would, so he thought, survive his infirmity."³⁴ The extent to which Krapp preferred solitude is clear when he records that he "celebrated the awful occasion [of his birthday], as in recent years, quietly at the Wine-house" with "not a soul" around him.³⁵ Instead of choosing to take a break once a year to celebrate his birthday, Krapp took even that time to pursue the life of a writer. However, this commitment to achievement only leaves him restless, and he repeatedly confesses his loneliness: "[I] never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited."³⁶ We learn that even his career has been unfulfilling, as only "seventeen copies [of his book] sold, of which eleven [were sold] at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas."³⁷ Though he invested himself in the life of a detached artist, he returns again and again on the tape to the moments he wants to relive, and to his disappointment, Krapp learns that beauty lies in moments shared and not in the achievement of brilliance. In accordance with Berkeley's philosophy, Krapp's greatest moments were those concerned with recognition.³⁸

Krapp, like Vladimir and Estragon, strongly desires to be seen, as evidenced through his obsession with eyes. His insatiable appetite for recognition, coupled with his misery due to his failure to connect with others, suggests that a meaningful existence cannot exist without others' perception. Krapp is particularly obsessed with the female gaze. For instance, though he calls his relationship with Bianca a "hopeless business," he fondly recalls her eyes as "very warm" and "incomparable"; he remembers "not much about her, apart from a tribute to her eyes."³⁹ Similarly, Krapp is drawn to a particular nurse because she happened to be looking at him: "whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me... [...] The face she had! The eyes!"⁴⁰ Krapp seems incapable of remembering people unless he feels acknowledged by them. The crucial boat scene to which Krapp returns repeatedly confirms how important the female gaze is for Krapp's sense of self:

"I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [*Pause.*] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments " [*Pause.*] after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow, and they opened. [*Pause. Low.*] Let me in"⁴¹

Here, the last sentence "Let me in" though unmistakably sexual in suggestion, also functions as Krapp's metaphysical plea: the girl needs to help him belong to this world. In his analysis, Knowlson acknowledges that the girl's eyes not only serve as windows to the soul, but also as mirrors, reflecting and confirming that which is before them.⁴² This is why Krapp cannot stand having the girl's eyes in

the sunlight and creates a shadow so that she can look at him properly: he needs to know that he is being perceived thoroughly to feel grounded. The present-day Krapp repeatedly returns to this part of the tape because this instance of companionship, gaze, and intimacy was when he felt most alive.

Lastly, Beckett shows the importance of self-perception for meaningful existence through Krapp's inability to address his present self. In Beckett's adaptation of idealism, self-recognition is just as indispensable as others' recognition in shaping one's existence. Krapp is always recording his future self or listening to his past self; he does not, or cannot, ever face his present self. To complicate matters further, the play is set in the future: Krapp "lives entirely outside time in a no-man's land," a place of "a repeated past and anticipated future."⁴³ The tape recorder limits Krapp to his past or future self, and his present self is preoccupied with everything but the now. "The words that Krapp had recorded so many years ago," Knowlson observes, "now represent the only form of contact that he can achieve in a depleted, solitary, almost totally barren existence."⁴⁴ If time is a relative term and reality is constructed of perceiving minds and ideas, Krapp never truly exists because he is never in the present.

Beckett uses the Berkeleian notion of perception in *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* to offer a solution to the problems that existentialism creates. The two plays echo Sartre's philosophy in their suggestion that there is no necessary or inherent purpose to life. However, Beckett provides a way out from existential despair in Berkeley's idealism, the philosophy that nothing in the world is made significant until chanced upon by a perceiving mind. Beckett's philosophy precludes passive and reclusive lives from being meaningful, and in this framework, Vladimir, Estragon, and Krapp's lives serve as the antithesis of the ideal lifestyle we should be pursuing. In short, Beckett's characters show what we should *not* do if we desire a purposeful life.

Conclusion

In the postmodern world where technology and ambition promote self-reliant individualism more than ever, Beckett warns that a meaningful existence can seldom be achieved alone. Despite life's inconsequential repetitions and routines, there is essence to be found, and, according to Beckett's drama, self-conscious trueness to the present self and the willingness to be perceived by others are at the crux of purposeful life:

Hence, it is the theatre, which is multidimensional and more than merely language or literature, which is the only instrument to express the bewildering complexity of the human condition. The human condition being what it is, with man small, help-less, insecure, and unable ever to fathom the world in all its hopelessness, death, and absurdity, the theatre has to confront him with the bitter truth that most human endeavor is irrational and senseless, that communication between human beings is well-nigh impossible, and that the world will forever remain an impenetrable mystery. At the same time, the recognition of all these bitter truths will have a liberating effect: if we realize the basic absurdity of most of our objectives, we are freed from being obsessed with them and this release expresses itself in laughter.⁴⁵

One must perceive oneself and one another to find meaning in this world. We cannot thrive on our own. Reconciling with the past, taking advantage of the present, and forming relationships with others point us to Beckettian redemptive existentialism "the philosophy that existence can be empowered when we are perceived, and that only when we are accepted do, we find meaning and significance.

Notes

- ¹ A word of own morphing: The apparent turgidity of an image the mind conjures and withholds until morphed into some other image. The power of the inventive mind is in holding true to the singular perception of the image as concrete and real is the *physiologicity* of imagination.
- ² Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (United States: Broadway Books, 2007).
- ³ John Rewald and Paul Cézanne, *Cezanne Biography* (New Caledonia: Harry N. Abrams, 1986).
- ⁴ Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (United Kingdom: Faber & Faber, 1951) 22–23.
- ⁵ This initial citation of the line in question refers to *The Riverside Shakespeare*. For the line in the First Folio, see Thompson and Taylor's Arden edition, 5.2.239. For the line in the Q2, see also their Arden edition, 5.2.269. The inclusion of the comma varies. *The First Quarto* does not include the line.
- ⁶ Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance', *Studies on Child Language and Aphasia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 49–73.
- ⁷ Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature', *The Liberal Imagination* (London: Heinemann, 1964), pp. 34–57 (pp. 52–53).
- ⁸ Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1976). See also Jacques Lacan, 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*', in Felman (ed.), *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 11–52.
- ⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' (1910), and 'Dostoevsky and Parricide' (1927), in *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson, Pelican Freud Library, vol XIV, pp. 143–231, esp. p. 167 and pp. 435–460. See also Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1907), in *Art and Literature*, pp. 129–141.
- ¹⁰ Quoted by Peter Gay in Freud, p. 444.
- ¹¹ As he triumphantly put it, 'After all, the conflict in *Hamlet* is so effectively concealed **that** it was left to me to unearth it' (VII, pp. 309–10, quoted in Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 34).
- ¹² See 'The signification of the Phallus', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp. 281–91.
- ¹³ See the special edition of *New Literary History* 12.1 (1980), *Psychology and Literature: Some Contemporary Directions*; and Nicholas Royle and Ann Wordsworth (eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Literature: New Work*, special edition of *The Oxford Literary Review* 12.1–2 (1990).
- ¹⁴ Ionesco, "Dans les Armes de la Ville," *Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault*, No. 20 (October 1957).
- ¹⁵ Martin Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd" *The Tulane Drama Review* (United States: Cambridge MIT Press, Vol. 4 No. 4, May 1960), 5.
- ¹⁶ John Fletcher, *About Beckett: The Playwright and the Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 20.
- ¹⁷ Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*. Ed. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano (Manchester: Clinaman, 2003), xvii–38.
- ¹⁸ John Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (UK: Yale University, 2007).
- ¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 11.
- ²⁰ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 74.
- ²¹ John Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (UK: Yale University, 2007).
- ²² Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 74.
- ²³ Samuel Beckett, "Krapp's Last Tape." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 217.
- ²⁴ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 222.
- ²⁵ George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), 3.
- ²⁶ Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, 6.
- ²⁷ Harold Bloom, "Guicharnaud J. Existence on Stage", *Modern Critical Views: Samuel Beckett* (United States: Facts on File, 2008), 116.
- ²⁸ David Berman, *Beckett and Berkeley* (Irish University Review Spring 14.1 1984), 5.
- ²⁹ Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot" *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 17.
- ³⁰ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 30.
- ³¹ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 50.
- ³² Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 47.

- ³³ David Berman, *Beckett and Berkeley* (Irish University Review Spring 14.1 1984), 5.
- ³⁴ Lois Gordon, *Krapp's Last Tape: A New Reading* (Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Spring 1990), 100.
- ³⁵ Samuel Beckett, "Krapp's Last Tape." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 217.
- ³⁶ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 223.
- ³⁷ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 222.
- ³⁸ Intriguing debates of the play also include Katharine Worth's "Past into Future: Krapp's Last Tape to Breath?" in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, ed. J. Acheson, K. Arthur (New York: St. Martin, 1987) 168–92, which treats how the resolution of light imagery marks a change in Beckett's style. Among the numerous discussions comparing Krapp and Proust, see Rosette Lamont, "Krapp: Anti-Proust," in *Theatre Workbook I*, ed. James Knowlson (London: Brutus Books, 19) 158–73; Arthur K. Oberg's "Krapp's Last Tape and the Proustian Vision," *Modern Drama* 9 (December 1966) 333–38, and Sandra Gilbert's "All the Dead Voices: A Study of Krapp's Last Tape," *Drama Survey* 6 (Spring 1968) 244–57.
- ³⁹ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 218.
- ⁴⁰ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 219.
- ⁴¹ Beckett, *Dramatic Works*, 221.
- ⁴² Knowlson and John Pilling, in *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove, 1979) 86–87, suggest that Krapp's rejection of earthy love is in the gnostic, Manichean tradition. See also Gontarski 56, which identifies Krapp's darkness as Schopenhauer's Will.
- ⁴³ Lois Gordon, *Krapp's Last Tape: A New Reading* (Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Spring 1990), 104.
- ⁴⁴ Indeed, Beckett's active participation in directing, along with his elaborate production notebooks, refine every detail. See James Knowlson, *Krapp's Last Tape: The Evolution of a Play, 1958–1975*, "Journal of Beckett Studies I" (Winter 1976), 50–65, which discusses the seven stages of the play's composition.
- To construct a veritable list of critical works on Beckett, see Roy Walker, "Samuel Beckett's Double Bill: Love, Chess and Death," *Twentieth Century*, 164 (December 1958) 533–44; Robert Brustein, "Krapp and a Little Claptrap," *New Republic*, 143 (February 22, 1960) 21–22; Ruby Conn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962) 248–50; Frederick J. Hoffman, *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1962) 155–59; Alec Reid, in *European Patterns*, ed. T.B. Harward (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1964) 38–43; Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove, 1964) 102–105; John Fletcher, "Action and Play in Beckett's Theater," *Modern Drama* 9 (December 1966) 242–50. See also Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1973) 129–35; Ruby Conn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 165–72; Bernard F. Dukore, "Krapp's Last Tape as Tragic-comedy," *Modern Drama* 15 (March 1974) 351–54; more recent essays include Sueellen Campbell, "Krapp's Last Tape—Critical Theory," *Comparative Drama* 12 (Fall 1978), 187–99; Andrew Kennedy, "Krapp's Dialogue of Selves," in *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 102–109; Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987), 196–202.
- ⁴⁵ Martin Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd" *The Tulane Drama Review* (United States: Cambridge MIT Press, Vol. 4 No. 4, May 1960), 6.

Plato's Aesthetic Adventure: The *Symposium* in the Broad Light of Comedy

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Abstract: Two Socratic dialogues often considered “comic”—*Ion* and *Hippias Major*—have also been contested as to their Platonic authenticity. Plato's dialogues, while certainly engaging, can also seem grim in their philosophical intensity: At least one author has contended that the dialogue more firmly established as genuinely by Plato, *Symposium*, has some comic elements: This article goes a step further in suggesting that this dialogue does not merely have comic elements but is in fact a comedy. It draws on several texts in the literature on Greek comedy over the past century and suggests that, although the dialogue sets itself serious philosophical challenges, its structure, style, and method are deeply steeped in comedic modes from around Plato's day. This is not to presume whether Plato was deliberately writing a comedy. In general, writers are often strongly influenced by literary fashions of the day, so it would not be far stretching the matter to understand the work as comedic. Thereby, the article offers, via textual analysis, an argument for how the dialogue is a comedy along with counter-arguments against such a notion. In the end, indeed, acknowledging it is a comedy promises to open up new angles on interpreting that dialogue.

Keywords: Plato, *Symposium*, Platonic dialogue as comedy, comedic form, Plato's aesthetic leap

Plato has a deep-running relationship, often antagonistic, with poetry. The *Republic* famously proscribes all poetry but military odes and religious hymns from the *Republic*. In the *Ion*, Socrates discusses poetry with the poet Ion. The *Symposium* includes a speech by comic-poet Aristophanes. But the nature and character of the dialogues, as pieces of writing themselves, bear a relation to poetry. The *Ion* and *Hippias Major* are sometimes deemed “comic” for, if not exactly comic, then not always serious elements, as Leddy (2022) describes. Indeed, we may run up against a wall in a dialogue such as *Ion*, as Leddy contends, for beguiling us with its challenge to interpretation as a practice.

The *Symposium* has also fueled contentions of its “comic” or “semicomical” (Levin 2007) elements. One commentator has called it “not just a vivid conversation; [but] a full-blown drama: a comedy in three acts with an introduction, two interludes, and an epilog,” although the comment does not offer further justification. Reeve (2007) labels the *Symposium* first, like *Laws*, as tragic. But unlike *Laws*, *Symposium* is also comic “since it also contains an imitation of the second-best kind of symposium described in the *Protagoras*.” However, whether or not *Symposium* is a tragedy, I find that it is distinctly comic according to many standards by which a work is assessed as comic. Plato's *Symposium* is more than just funny and a pure joy and celebration of life. I argue that the work fits many major tropes of that literary mode. This understanding of *Symposium* can influence the way to approach Plato's philosophy in general.

First I look in more detail at the problem of genre for all of Plato's works. Readers then, as now, still face a problem of just which genre his dialogues fall into. This problem opens up to a general one in interpreting his oeuvre. I then turn to reader response as one way of gauging a genre.

Response to the *Symposium*, I suggest, is response to a comedy. I support this contention with literary theory about genres, indicating the structure of *Symposium* is, literally, classically comic. With this understanding of the *Symposium* as a comedy, the article's final section asks and answers how this perspective may help in reading Plato's philosophy.

1. A Comic Problem: of Genre

In *Genres in Dialogue*, Nightingale (1995) proposes that Plato blended a spectrum of genres—speech, encomium, tragedy, lyric poetry, comedy—often in parody. This spectrum helped position his new genre of philosophy against earlier types of that genre and other genres of literature. However, her thesis does not answer exactly how the reader is to respond to the dialogues. Readers and audiences often know how to respond to a work by being able to place mentally certain forms, symbols, or stock characters into known categories, aiding in assessing what this new work is communicating. In this way, genres operate like an extension of language, with symbols and syntax that can be assembled in a new way for new expression and communication. So, when a reader encounters a Platonic dialogue, what kind of response is elicited? Perhaps we do not always root for Socrates. In the end, if Socrates triumphs, it is hard to conceive that readers turn and alter their life in accord with what Socrates said. In so many dialogues, such as *Euthyphro* or *Protagoras*, it is difficult to label the end as even a stalemate, but something more like the rhinoceros who has forgotten why it is charging.

As written philosophy was new in Plato's time, he had no long tradition against which to position his writings. Many of his dialogues position his particular kind of work against both poetry and competing philosophy, whether oral or written. Poetry having the longer tradition of the two, it is understandable he would sometimes challenge it as a rival (and for other, philosophic reasons). However, because philosophy *was* so ill-defined and he as a philosopher was one of the first to give it a rigorous definition, he had scant background against which to say exactly what kind *he* was doing. There was only the philosophy that came later, which necessarily was a retrospective interpretation of Plato, superimposing later philosophical perspectives upon him, eventually canonizing his works and construing them as systematic philosophy—a systematization that philosophy developed only later. In his writings themselves, however, there appears to be little self-consciousness about what *kind* of writings these are, primarily because they are the first of whatever kind they are. Many of them do not seem to be transcriptions of actual dialogues, as some amount of fictionalizing¹ distances them from, say, Thucydides-style history. They are seemingly not dramatic poetry, despite their multiple characters; besides, they are prose. They certainly are not speeches or letters, among the other major prose forms developing in his day. In fact, Socrates's diatribe against writing in *Phaedrus* makes it seem that even this written version of dialectic is but a shadow of the true, oral version. As Plato does not state just what he is trying to achieve in his dialogues and the reader can hardly dictate Plato's intentions, what does Plato finally achieve, in terms of a genre of literature, if it is *not* systematic philosophy of the sort developed later in history?

For help, the reader first should not let Plato's criticism of poetry nor the fact he writes in prose mean Plato would never employ any of poetry's techniques. In fact, in *Laws* (0952), Plato outlines a society where comic poetry would have a place [816C – 817E]. On the other hand, the fact he uses dialogue does not warrant imputations he was a "closet dramatist"—as if he were envious, wishing he could write hexameter and derived this mixed form in which his dogma is laboriously squeezed out through his mouthpiece Socrates. However, the fact of the dramatic presentation cannot help but elicit a certain response in the reader. That response can serve as a guide to the reader for how to interpret the work. Moreover, the fact Plato does reveal himself apparently vying with poetry for hearts and minds may help readers assess their responses in the context of Plato's work as a whole. He rarely appears in a dialogue—mentioned in *Apology*, and sick at home in *Phaedo*, so he cannot state his intentions. Such reader responses to this new genre,

then, as one from within the universe of genres, can be key to assessing what Plato's is doing as a body of written work.

What *is* one such response? I have found that the response to *Symposium* is that accorded comedy. In fact, the world within *Symposium* is isomorphic with that within the broad genre of comedy, as I detail later. Not only is the reader response like that to known comedies, but the form, characterizations, and tropes within the dialogue correspond to those within comedies, as described in literary criticism. These facts confirm that *Symposium* is itself a comedy and that Plato was inventing a new form of the genre—right around the time Old Comedy was itself evolving into Middle. His polemics and passages from *Symposium* and other dialogues allow the interpretation that he might be the creator of a new genre. And understanding this dialogue as a comedy could make a difference in interpreting his work in general.

2. Comic Response

From the start, *Symposium* is jaunty. The story travels; it is swift. At once, Glaucon calls out “playfully” to Apollodorus; He begs to hear a certain story of love.. Apollodorus, the narrator, was traveling when he heard the story. He was told of one, itself about travelers—to a feast.² Already, the reader smiles. The story line bounces along gleefully: Stories are embedded within stories embedded in stories. Apollodorus tells his Companion how he had encountered Glaucon who had heard the story of Agathon's feast (years ago) but wanted to hear the correct version from Apollodorus. Apollodorus then tells his Companion how he told Glaucon the story that he, Apollodorus, had heard from Aristodemus, who had actually been at the feast.³ The embedding fictionalizes and distances the story of the feast and thus makes its setting almost legendary and magical. It also establishes a merry confusion of personages and sparkling mood of delight.

Apollodorus's embedded story (of the feast, as told to the Companion) itself begins with Aristodemus's and Socrates's meeting-up on the road to the feast. Socrates, jocular and sarcastic, quips how he is in his fine clothes because he is off to see a fine man [174A]. And the two sing merry bits of Homer about traveling to feasts, in a mood much like that of the travelers singing in the later comedy romance, *The Wizard of Oz*, off to see another fine man. No sooner do the two arrive at the feast, than a “comical thing happened” [174B]: Socrates disappears, only later to be found outside alone, staring into nothing like a stargazing scarecrow. What else would a philosopher be doing? It is as if he had just stepped off the stage from Aristophanes's *Clouds*. (1952) If Plato makes us laugh at the man Aristophanes skewered to death, who gets the last laugh?

The entertaining pace continues. No sooner does Socrates emerge from his philosopher's stupor than he has a repartee with Agathon, with a subtlety seen millennia later in Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1995) haughty wit in a comedy of aristocratic manners. “How I wish that wisdom could be infused by touch, out of the fuller into the emptier man” [175C], Socrates says to Agathon, with an outlandish image of wisdom poured like liquid from Agathon into a reclining Socrates.

Socrates's praises border not only on sarcasm but on effusiveness—as manic as Groucho Marx upon being introduced to the University Chancellor in *Horsefeathers*. (date) Socrates is enthusiastic, he is happy, he is at the top of his form. He gets to be with the brightest stars, he has a chance to strut his stuff, and he gets to show up everyone and unmask them while he pretends he is nothing and while everybody knows it is a pretense and *knows* he is something. He could not have a better time—and it is all philosophy. The scene is hilarious, is all for the good, and anything but goody-goody.

As if the pace were not fast enough, love is so heavy in the air you can taste it. “Salt has been the theme of eloquent discourse” [177B]—so why, pleads Eryximachus, not make Love itself the subject of encomiums? Make love the object of everyone's obsession, and it is hard to respond by sobbing.⁴ From page 1, Glaucon has foreshadowed that this would be a love story, and he has set the tone. The idea alone of a bevy of carousers singing their praises to the greatest human foible

does not evoke a solemn mood. Perhaps if the encomiasts had been placed in a temple, the brow might furrow and the head bow. But with Eryximachus saying that if even salt could merit high praise, then surely, Love deserves as much. Eros is set among funny company.

Love does take a drubbing of praise. From Agathon's fustian babble to Phaedrus's plebian worship to Eryximachus's quotidian dissection, Love is not so much praised as used to buff the speaker's pride and profundity. Eros, while allegedly upheld, seemingly becomes the poor misunderstood character, the Charlie Chaplin Tramp kicked about by the bigwigs of society and hoping to find someone who will understand. Between the antics of each speech runs the slapstick of Aristophanes's hiccupping or tickling his nose to sneeze, Socrates's damning Agathon's speech with syrupy praise, Alcibiades's storming in as soaked as an ocean and trying—unsuccessfully—to drink Socrates under the table, and some lovers' squabbles between Alcibiades and Socrates. Of the seven speakers whom Aristodemus remembers, the middle one (the peak of the seven speakers, with three speeches before and three after⁵) is Aristophanes. His madcap speech, with its roly-poly humans cleaved in half by Zeus and their scampering about fusing with whoever they can in a search for their other half, dominates at the pinnacle of absurdity over all the speeches. (It even ties in with Socrates's later characterization of love as desire for what one does not possess [200A].)

Socrates cleverly sidesteps the error of those encomiasts who bring more gloss to themselves and their speechifying than to the object of their speechification: He tells of what another personality, Diotima, taught *him* about love. She whips him as much as the speechifiers inadvertently whip Love. She chastises him for ignorance and slowness. In a further twist, Socrates, the shameless buffoon—the prototype Tramp “naively” exposing both himself and all the kicking around he has experienced—reveals himself subjected to the same sort of dialectical drubbing by *her* which *he* subjects others. In the biggest twist of them all, Socrates says, Love is not the most beautiful, wisest, youngest or oldest god as other speakers paint him, but an ugly, destitute bastard child of two reckless gods.

In a final flouting of *everyone's* speech, Alcibiades tops off the set with his inebriated bumbling. After crowning Socrates, he tries to make Socrates out to be *some* kind of superhero—if a somewhat off-kilter one, who on a military expedition stood absolutely still all morning trying to resolve a philosophical puzzle [220C]. But as Nightingale points out (1995: 127), Alcibiades does not quite *get* Socrates, cannot reach his arms around him, in more ways than one. He does not really get the fact that Socrates does not want a sex-for-philosophy exchange [218B – 219A]—and that this proclivity of Socrates's lies at the heart of his philosophical outlook: “I fancied that he was smitten, and that the words which I had uttered like arrows had wounded him...” [219A]. He also labels Socrates ‘despot’ and says “in conversation [he] is the conqueror of all mankind” [213D]. Yet, in the end, despite all Alcibiades's stabs at praise and fusillade, Socrates remains the Tramp, misunderstood in the street: “you might see him... in the streets of Athens, stalking like a pelican and rolling his eyes...” [221A]

As if there were not enough comic twists on the subject of love already, Alcibiades brings out another way that Love enters the dialogue: and that is Love flitting through the hearts at the feast itself. A whole subplot of love intrigue winds underneath this contest of encomium. No other than the roguish Alcibiades stands at the center of a love triangle including Agathon and Socrates. When Alcibiades enters [212D], he—as Socrates later reveals [222C]—understands that Socrates should still be his lover and he, Alcibiades, should be Agathon's. But at the end of his speech, Alcibiades shows that he understands that Socrates has been trying to seduce Agathon—and so he warns Agathon, “Be not deceived by” Socrates [222A] and the philosopher's wiles. In this final bit of “Satyric drama” [222C], in a pitch of Aristophanic madhouse romp, there ensues a tug-of-war between former lover Socrates and former beloved Alcibiades for the couch of Agathon. When Alcibiades outright commands Agathon to lie with him, Socrates responds in one of the most humorous lines in the dialogue, like a mix-up scene from *A Night at the Opera*: (1931) “Certainly not... as you praised me, and I in turn ought to praise my neighbor on the right

[Agathon], he will be out of order in praising me again when he ought to be praised by me..." [222E]. At once Agathon leaps up: "I will rise instantly, that I might be praised by Socrates." [223A] Giving the final twist to the farce, the defeated Alcibiades grumbles "The usual way, where Socrates is, no one else has a chance with the fair" [223A]. For all Socrates's heady talk about love from the soul and beyond the flesh, it comes out that he is the top lecher of them all.

Plato lets Socrates drink anyone under the table without getting the least dizzy himself. Socrates does reach love beyond this world, but like Chaplin's Tramp, in the end he also wins the earthly Beauty's heart. And in this last twist of the "plot of this Satyric drama," it becomes apparent that Socrates may have indeed dressed up in his finery and given his typically humble-sounding speech to woo that fine man Agathon. And Alcibiades gives his speech in hopes of retaining Socrates's heart while, through showing Socrates is done with him, winning Agathon's. Plato throws his own long-time hero into this same riot of the rabble with everyone, holding no punches even for the satyr who gets pummeled by everyone, including himself. However, who wins this comic contest? It is Socrates, beside whom Agathon, winner of the earlier tragic contest, lies.

The closing image: After the wild all-night revel that celebrates this "marriage," Socrates is staying up until cock-crow, indefatigably discoursing, as the head of an isosceles triangle, with the tragic poet Agathon at one side and the comic poet Aristophanes on the other, about—what else? That the genius of tragedy on the one hand, and that of comedy, on the other, could be fused in one—not, perhaps, the one represented by the head of the triangle? The *philosopher*?

3. Comic Structure

If the dialogue, as a straight unamusing read, were not enough of a feast, the reader wanting to confirm such a response may turn to literary criticism. Can something so crusty as philosophy really be such a joyride?

With Plato's evident interest in poetry and the dramatic nature of his works, an influence, either consciously or not, from the comic poets would not be surprising. His social class and wide-reaching interests would thrust him into the centers of Athenian culture, as indicated by his pervasive quoting from the poets, ancient and contemporary, and knowledge of all the arts high and low. He would understandably be moved or influenced by the prevailing cultural mood—zeitgeist—that guides writers and authors in a given period. Similarly, Hume exhibits much the same luxurious, flowing, and ornate prose style of Henry Fielding and Gibbon; Quine has the confident and breezy literary style of Bellow and Roth, while Searle and other contemporaries use the clipped and democratic "for-the-people" short sentences of much post-World War II American fiction.

Plato wrote *Symposium* sometime after 385 and he died around 346, so the work appeared as Old Comedy was giving way to Middle and before the advent of New. Given that Aristophanes is so central a character in *Symposium*, Plato would have plausibly incorporated elements of Aristophanic comedy into the dialogue. I will describe characteristics of Old Comedy seen in the *Symposium*.⁶ Next I will point out another set of characteristics that it shares with later kinds of comedy. If this second set genuinely holds for this work, Plato may credibly be a forerunner of New Comedy. And we should not be surprised if such a sensitive bellwether of society and culture as Plato had been so prescient.

The origins of Aristophanic comedy in the Dionysian rites account for much of the highly sexual nature of the plots. (Dover 1972, Porter 2009) "Comedy" or *κομωδία* means "song of the *κομος*" which was one of the ritual procedures from the carousing Dionysian rites. Actors for the male parts in Old Comedy wore large phalluses, sexual innuendo was rife, food and drink often appeared, and choruses were often animals or other natural entities much like the costumed figures in the Dionysian carnival. The playful, Mardi Gras-like nature of the old rites carried over to the plays' social satire and derision of political and military. As Stephen Dover (1972) writes:

[the] devaluation of gods, politicians, generals and intellectuals may be taken together with recourse to violence, uninhibited sexuality, frequent reference to excretion and unrestricted vulgarity of language, as different forms of self-assertion of man against the unseen world, of the average man against superior authority, and of the individual against society. (41)

Ribaldry, fun, jest, sex and love, carousing, food and drink and party, the celebration of life and vitality and virility—the elements of Aristophanes, they also compose the atmosphere of *Symposium*.

A “symposium” is a drinking together (“sym,” together; “posis,” drinking), and the setting of Plato’s is certainly a large feast. And while the drinking was not “the order of the day” but was allowed at whatever level the individual desired, it still is the ongoing action in the plot. Witness the drinking contest. The food appears, and in time, the love and sex. But more particularly Aristophanic elements show up, such as satire. The drubbing of Alcibiades has its satirical edge: In a great satirical tradition, the [revered] politician is stripped down to the mere all-too-human level: that of a former lover and now a bumbling rival of crafty senior-citizen Socrates. His beating in the drinking contest has an element of comment on his political stature: He cannot uphold his proud veneer. The appearance of Aristophanes is a perfect parody of *Aristophanes’* own forced appearances of poets, particularly Euripides, in his plays. Is *Symposium’s* competition of love speeches not a parody of Aristophanes’ *Frogs’* own competition of poets? (The reader can easily imagine all the *dramatis personae* equipped with large leather phalluses during these speeches.) In *Symposium*, Aristophanes’ mad speech of the roly-poly lovers is, in one light, a satire of the satirist’s own form of satires. On the one hand, the speech is beautiful and philosophically loaded and will become, along with the allegory of the cave, one of Plato’s most famous images in the popular mind to this day. On the other hand, it is wickedly funny and a skewer into the gut of a man who helped bring down the reputation of Plato’s teacher and may have contributed to his eventual conviction.

Deeper than these atmospheric features, Aristophanic structures run through *Symposium’s* plot. The dialogue has the Aristophanic hero and a fantastic scheme. In Old Comedy, this hero would often be a rustic, or someone from the lower classes, earthy and plain, commonly a big drinker, that is, someone not normally admired. Importantly, he saves the day in the Aristophanic play. (In *Clouds*, Strepsiades seems to be this character.) While Socrates is not quite lower class or rustic, he is from the outside, perceived to be somewhat disreputable—and can he drink. And, importantly, he saves the day in the end, through his typically Socratic method of inquiry, acting as an interceder among all the speeches of love: His speech tops them all. Where the other speeches left something wanting, his satisfies the ongoing discontent. Socrates saves the day not just in the love-speech competition but in the real-love competition, for Agathon. He wins on all counts: He is crowned. The plot includes the fantastic Aristophanic scheme. In *Frogs* Aristophanes might have the poets in hell competing to return to Earth. *Symposium’s* fantastic scheme is appropriately enacted by Aristophanes himself, in his scheme to account for love through the split globular beings. Upon a stepping back, the whole scheme of explaining love through drunken competition of politicians, poets, and philosophers may be the most fantastic of all.

Other Old Comedy elements run through the dialogue, such as theme of journeys (as seen in *Frogs* and *Women of the Thesmophoriazusae*) and the ending in a marriage. There is also a conflict with an authority figure, which I cover in discussing the following riskier proposition: that Plato also wrote into *Symposium* elements that would flower in New Comedy. After all, Old Comedy had long ended with the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian War in 404 and the resulting disillusionment in the city. While there are few remnants of Middle Comedy, which would have been contemporaneous with *Symposium*, it would be reasonable to surmise it had fewer of the biting edges of the Old and more of the smoother surfaces of the New. It is also reasonable to suggest that Plato as well would have been susceptible to the same cultural tendencies that moved poets to redefine comedy. Next I inquire whether *Symposium* exhibits some of those elements that would eventually become particular to New Comedy and forms of comedy that persist to this day.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1957) lays out his theory of literary mythos, with their four-seasons-based archetypes: the mythos of spring being comedy; that of summer, romance; autumn, tragedy; and winter, irony and satire. While Frye is not the final word in critical characterization of comedy, his system at least offers powerful tools to help assess why a reader may respond to *Symposium* as a comedy. Frye does not strictly delineate one mythos in general from another in terms of a list of traits. Rather, he provides examples from each mythos and how its set of distinctive traits start to emerge from a larger set, which no single work exhibits exhaustively. As his four archetypes overlap with their adjacent ones, comedy, like spring itself, has a wintry bite (of irony and satire); a comedy such as *Symposium* may have its share of parody and irony. It may also overlap with summer and romance, of which *Symposium* has plenty. In the mythos of comedy, several distinctively comic traits start to emerge which dovetail with features of *Symposium* and tell the reader, yes, there was a reason that the dialogue felt like a comedy.

Noting that comedy has been “remarkably tenacious” (163) of its structure and stock characters over the millennia, Frye first describes the usual plot handed down from Greek New Comedy, which has become the standard skeleton for much later comedy. A lover wants a beloved but is obstructed by some opposition (often parental), but by a twist in the end, the obstruction is overcome and the lovers unite. Of course, Plato wrote before the advent of New Comedy, but during the time of transition from Old to Middle. Nonetheless, presciently, *Symposium*'s plot follows the same stock plot that would eventually develop: Socrates wants Agathon but is obstructed by Alcibiades. Through the twist of Alcibiades's bacchanalian entry and self-destructive speech, Socrates comes out on top and wins Agathon.⁷

Frye also describes an undercurrent through this general comic plot structure: From the beginning, when the lovers are not yet united, until the obstruction is lifted and they finally become one, there is a movement from an old society to a new one. The old society is associated with the obstruction. There is in this in this undercurrent much of the element of the conflict with an authority figure seen in Old Comedy. In *Symposium*, I believe that the sharp edge of this element in Old Comedy has become more like the conflict with the obstruction to a love figure as imposed by the old society. Clearly, in *Symposium*, there is an old society, represented by the likes of Pausanias and Eryximachus and their old-time ideas of Love as two goddesses, and it must involve the two principles they represent.⁸ Socrates is also clearly the upstart, the lover who itches to throw off this old order, though not for his own selfish ends (that is, to attain his beloved), but for the greater good of a new order.

However, Alcibiades's role as part of the old society is not as clear. He is the old beloved and forms an obstruction. As a political leader, he is part of the “society of the many” and in that way is the old establishment. In his speech, he also reveals he is baffled by Socrates, as his “old-order” thinking does not quite allow him to comprehend this being, Socrates. But his role qua obstruction does not depend upon his being part of that old order: His obstruction, then, primarily derives from the fact he is Socrates's old love interest *and* he wants Socrates's own new love interest. Nonetheless, he performs the crowning act that symbolizes the fact Socrates has triumphed as leader of the new society: He literally crowns Socrates—by taking the ribands from his own head and placing them on his ex-lover's. There could not be a clearer act of transference from old order to new.

Concomitant with the change of order is an unmasking of the old by the new.⁹ Socrates undertakes such unmasking, on the one hand, by revealing the trivialities and pomposities of the company's encomiums of love, and on the other hand by revealing Alcibiades as having no other purpose in his speech than a love trick: “only an ingenious circumlocution, of which the point comes by the way at the end; you want to get up a quarrel between me and Agathon.” [222C] After the unmasking and change of order, in general, “[c]omedy usually moves toward a happy ending” (167)—as does *Symposium*. This change and happy ending often arrive in the form of a party, commonly a wedding. Although there had been feasting at Agathon's before the point

where Socrates and the speeches enter, it is almost prescient of Plato, anticipating the stock comic plot structure, to hold this feast in abeyance—suddenly no one wants to get drunk—until the very end when the lovers are united. In the very same sentence signifying Agathon's rise to lie with Socrates, the "band of revelers entered" [223A] and "great confusion ensued," and the banquet really cuts loose: "everyone was compelled to drink large quantities of wine" [223A]. Although Agathon and Socrates are hardly wedded, Plato symbolically fetes them as much as could happen in homoerotic Athens.

Symposium even exhibits some of the stock characters who creep up in comedy in general. Frye mentions the *miles gloriosus*, or military braggart; (163) the *alazons*, imposters; *eirons*, self-deprecators; *bomolochoi*, buffoons; and *agroikos*, the rustic or churl. (172) While the *eirón* deprecates himself, the *alazons* are the victims of his irony: a picture-perfect relationship of Socrates to the other encomiasts. Socrates, in the way he sets himself up to take drubbings, also often plays the role of *bomolochoi*. Alcibiades is both a *miles gloriosus* and, to some degree, the *agroikos*, at least in the way much humor bounces off of him. Aristophanes more obviously plays a *bomolochoi*.

Frye also describes several "phases of comedy" in the spectrum between irony and romance.¹⁰ Nightingale 1995 has pointed out (110) the irony in *Symposium*, particularly in Socrates's encomiums of the speeches themselves.¹¹ Toward the other end of the comic-phase spectrum, nearer to romance, Frye reveals another motif: In this phase, on the journey from the old to new society, there is often a side trip into a "green world," the wilderness, such as that extensively seen in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. A female figure there is often involved in the transformative process of the green-world journey, which also has a dreamy quality. Socrates's telling of his "journey" to Diotima and its dreamy instructions on the mysteries of love fulfill this motif.

For someone who did theorize extensively about the structures of comedy, even though he blatantly dabbled in myth, Plato exhibited impressive insight into the mythos of comedy, long before the concept of such mythos was conceived, just by the way he structured *Symposium*. While he did have plenty of comic models in Athens, it is hard to tell if he were consciously incorporating the Old (and probably Middle) Comedy elements into this dialogue. With his sensitivity to artistic forms and cultural facts, he just may have anticipated some elements of New Comedy in this his primary comedic work. He was too self-aware a writer simply to be madened by a muse as the poets were and have no idea what he was doing. He wrote in prose, not verse; he could not be like the poets in *Ion*, idiosyncratic, insane ("inspired"), and ignorant. Instead, he would opt for breadth and depth of knowledge and conscious work. That would be the reasoned approach. And perhaps *Symposium* can stand as an example of how we may have acceptable "laughable" works in a well-ordered Republic, as the next section discusses.

4. Comic Dialogue

So, the *Symposium* feels like comedy. It looks like comedy. But is it comedy? Much of what defines an artwork, say, is the cultural context in which the work arises. A bulldozer sitting in a vacant lot is just a bulldozer, but if a sculptor hoists it into a museum, it is suddenly a sculpture and is seen through a different perspective, such as that of social commentary. To a degree, a comedy is a comedy when the author says it is, and if the author is not a liar, it is then assessed as either a comedy, good or bad (as seen in Duchamp's urinal). Plato is not known to have labeled any of his dialogues as comedies or tragedies. He did not necessarily even label them as "philosophy": They simply present representation (or even μῆσις) of people *doing* philosophy, or dialectic. As I described, a challenge in interpreting Plato is partly due to there being little extant cultural context for his genre, comparable to the context available for a comedy audience, who can assure themselves, "This is a comedy; I know basically what sort of thing it is, so I can assess it." (And there is scant extant tradition of written dialectic directly *after* Plato to aid this effort.) Thus, as I argued earlier, almost all the reader has to assess what kind of work the dialogue is, is

direct response. Similarly does a viewer, who has not been told what type of strange movie that is about to be shown, have to figure out what genre it is by what it feels and looks like.

However, as I have shown, both the response to *and* the structural appearance of *Symposium* is comedy. The immediate reaction to this assessment may be, *But the dialogue is prose—obviously never meant to be performed—not poetry. Within the conventions of his day, Plato could not possibly have intended “comedy.” Maybe it has comic elements, at most.* However, Plato allowed that comedy could be improved to turn it into something permissible in a just society [*Laws*, 816E¹²], if the proper regulations of laughable amusements are laid down. “For serious things cannot be understood without laughable things” [816D], in keeping with his usual theory of opposites (cf. *Phaedo*, 70E – 72A). A man “should learn them both, in order that he may not in ignorance do or say anything which is ridiculous” [*Laws*, 816D]. In this State in *Laws*, poetry is “of the best and noblest” in the same way the state itself is an “imitation of the best and noblest life” [817A]. As Nightingale interprets these passages, Plato is contrasting the supposedly serious creations of his contemporary poets “with the most beautiful and finest’ tragedy that he and his interlocutors are themselves producing in their construction of a good code of laws.” (88) In other words, a work like *Laws* is Plato’s version of serious drama.

In turn, at the end of *Symposium*, when Socrates is reported to be expounding how tragic and comic may arise from the same genius, Plato may have been hinting of no other genius than himself. If *Laws* is a tragic output, *Symposium* is certainly the comic. Even better examples of tragedies, at least in the Aristotelian sense that Frye describes, may be *Phaedo* or *Crito*: While comedy more often centers on the social group (*Symposium*), tragedy focuses on the plight on an individual (*Phaedo*). “The tragic hero is typically on top of the wheel of fortune, halfway between human society on the ground and the something greater in the sky,” Frye writes (2007)—and could not have more accurately encapsulated *Phaedo*. Socrates in *Phaedo* may even be said to have the hubris of the typical tragic hero which leads to his downfall, except his pride is humble as is his faith in the truth beyond himself. In a way, *Phaedo* is an *uber*-tragedy because the hero’s fall is not *for* himself and his stubborn pride but something outside him that only he will stubbornly represent. He does not evoke the same pity of the usual tragic hero in whom the audience senses their own pathetic selves and so “purged” by experiencing the other vicariously. *Phaedo* is indeed a purified tragedy of “the best and noblest.” *Symposium* is its purified comic counterpart, in which love at the joyous end is not merely the carnal conjoining of marriage but the joining of minds in dialectic, in the highest love, love of wisdom.

If *Symposium* is comedy of some kind, what is the resultant effect in terms of how Plato presents philosophy? First, it is significant that Plato wrote it and all the dialogues in prose. Nightingale observes the struggle of the emergence of prose forms as distinct from the poetic, in Plato’s day.¹³ Prose forms, such as the encomium, letter, speech, and history, were taking shape in the hands of writers such as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Isocrates. Imagining oneself in 5th to 4th century Athens, one might perceive poetry as generally “public” forms—continually recited or sung, if epic or lyric, or viewed, if tragic or comic—whereas, even though speeches may be read many times, at least the history or letter more often would be privately read (though aloud). The tenor of an overwhelmingly “public” genre, such as poetry, may seem tainted by long history of public approbation of its content, whereas prose included genres with new possibilities for more strictly private perusal and assessment. Prose may have an obvious appeal for someone seeking to convey completely new ideas that seek anything but public approbation. Prose was far from the madding crowds.

Furthermore, prose is not subject to the same artificial strictures of meter as poetry is. Prose can flow with the natural rhythms of the spoken voice, perfectly suited for a writer perhaps frustrated by the written word alone but needing to approximate as close as possible the rhythms of unfettered dialectic. Hence, the unselfconscious exchange in which words are the invisible medium to a greater world, not the ends in themselves.

Far from being a “closet dramatist” who just could not write hexameter, Plato chose the mode of prose, and within it constructed his own genre, which suited his philosophical program. That genre, in light of the fact that at least some of the works were tragedies or comedies and were in prose most likely for private perusal, may be considered “armchair dramas.” The reader in privacy gets all the benefits of comedy or drama without the harms of an author’s kowtowing to public tastes, without the falsehoods of dramatic and poetic *μυήσις*, and with at least some of the benefits of vicariously experiencing dialectic. The written dialectic may be, compared with the real-life dialectic, only a shadow, just as this world is only a shadow of the realm of the forms. But perhaps, just as the senses’ perceiving the images of this world is a spur to philosophic contemplation of the forms, writing dialectic may spur the reader’s soul into the best way to engage in genuine dialectic. Considering the way *μυήσις* so troubled Plato in the *Republic*, prose dialogues may be the least like *μυήσις* of the written genres and the most like the thing itself.

As armchair dramas, then, the dialogues take on a different approach to philosophy than they would as merely stagy, sexy ways to present dialectical philosophy. Not merely cryptic manuals to a hidden, precise system of thought, they offer vicarious instruction on how to think for oneself. What Socrates so happens to think is subservient to the greater good of bringing the reader, as if on a phantasmagorical obstacle course, into the depths of a mind in operation, so the reader’s own mind is jump-started into operation. Analogously, what Hamlet or Puck so happens to think is subservient to the greater good of the audience traveling into these characters’ lives and emotions. This understanding of the dialogues does not deny that Plato, via Socrates or the Eleatic Stranger, was perhaps trying to work through very difficult issues over the course of years and made remarkable headway that others may pick up as they saw fit. However, it is often difficult to pinpoint exactly what Socrates believes about the ultimate reality or the gods. He seems to drift into a woozy dream-world where the impact of the parable is more at the intuitive than the intellectual level. This understanding about the dialogues does account for a recurrent whimsicality of Socrates.

This understanding may also account for certain philosophical inconsistencies among the dialogues as a whole. One such inconsistency arises in the way, in *Republic*, justice is understood by means of a society built upon its war-making capacity, whereas in *Phaedo*, “wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body” [66A]. Yet, “if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must quit the body” [66E]: Justice and knowledge could hardly be derived from something (a war society) that is wholly in service of the body. However, through the understanding that each dialogue is an exploratory instruction in dialectic, there is no need to force consistency among the dialogues in order to reconstruct a system of the sort later seen in systematic philosophy (or perhaps in a single large work of Plato’s such as *Laws*). More important is the process, the practice, of philosophy, which only the individual can do through his or her own endeavor. Such an understanding of the dialogues, of course, would question much of later, Platonic and neoplatonic efforts to make his philosophy as a whole systematic, as such an effort would be fossilizing something that lives only as a breathing, speaking being. In fact, considering how Plato is repeatedly suspicious of *μυήσις*, this view of the dialogues as living entities in their own right would at least help them transcend the problem of their being mere, dead products of *μυήσις*, of living dialectic.

5. Concluding Thought

What about the works, such as *Statesmen* and *Laws*, which lose almost all their drama and characterization and so seem to be little more than Plato’s whipping out dry systematic philosophy in the image of dialogue because that is the genre Plato knows? Perhaps Plato did, finally, like many writers to follow him,¹⁴ start to parody himself. Or even these works may still be understood less as dramatic armchair dramas where the “excitement” resides more in the labyrinthine explorations. Nonetheless the instructive value of exercising the philosophic muscle takes precedence over the didactic goal of laying down an ironclad philosophical system. Even the

Eleatic Stranger and Young Socrates in *Statesman* ask rhetorically, “is our inquiry... only intended to improve our knowledge of politics, or our power of reasoning generally? Clearly... the purpose is general” [285D]. These characters only affirm the understanding I posited for the other dialogues, considering them as armchair dramas.

Perhaps in later works Plato moved away from the armchair-dialogue approach altogether. It would require detailed examination of the dialogues through the perspective of this understanding to see if it sustains through all of them or see if he did become more systematic.¹⁵ Either way, this perspective could make a difference in interpreting his philosophy in contrast to any approach that takes the body of work as singularly systematic.

The question remains, But why *comedy*? In Plato's day, comedy attracted a much wider audience than philosophy did—and it still does. Perhaps Plato did not hope to attract the general approval. But in Kaufman's account (1968), Plato and Nietzsche are among the best-selling philosophers these days, read widely among non-philosophers, and *Symposium* is one of Plato's most popular. If Plato did have good intimations about the mythos of comedy as it would soon develop in New Comedy, maybe, just maybe, he had a good sense of its wide appeal. Getting the word out would only be just, after the way his teacher was treated.

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Notes

¹ Fictionalizing may be seen in *Symposium* in the anachronisms about the 385 BCE dispersal of the Acadians into villages [193A] or in the embedded-narrative techniques.

² Including all this traveling is almost instinctive of Plato, in presaging travel as a trope for much later comic fiction, including Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the Spanish picaresque novels, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In these later works, the narrator or at least one major character is traveling. Traveling implies either a fluidity through *society* or a complete “outsider” relation to it. In general, the relation of being outside society and creating a new one is seen by at least one critic (such as Northrop Frye; see below) as an important part of the mythos of comedy.

³ There are at least six stories, then: (1) the first level, Apollodorus speaking with his companion; (2) the false version of Agathon's feast told to Glaucon but only hinted at; (3) the correct version Aristodemus told Glaucon; (4) the event itself; (5) the version Apollodorus told Glaucon; and (6) the version embedded in (1) of Apollodorus telling his Companion the “correct” version he learned from Aristodemus and told Glaucon. There is, in addition, Socrates's own embedded tale of Diotima and Alcibiades's tale of Socrates. Like *Don Quixote*, *Symposium* is made almost exclusively of intricate story-weaving.

⁴ Pace *Romeo and Juliet*. However, love tragedies and romances are hardly about love as obsession; they are about love as *possession*—in the sense of demonic possession.

⁵ The Pythagorean numerology can yield a heyday of analyses.

⁶ For descriptions of Old Comedy, I draw variously from: K. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 1972; K. Lever, *Art of Greek Comedy*, 1956; and G. Norwood, *Greek Comedy*, 1935.

⁷ One can only speculate whether Plato had been sensitive to the inchoate cultural zeitgeist when the very seeds of New Comedy were only being germinated in the sprouting Middle Comedy: It could make an intriguing speculative study of those developments.

⁸ Socrates's idea of love does involve the principles of bodily and spiritual love as well, so in a way he incorporates much of the earlier speeches' ideas, but he also supercedes them by sowing love as a single, ugly god and emphasizing a higher philosophical love as the true love.

⁹ Frye (1957) calls this general development in the comic plot the “comic discovery” *anagnorisis*, or *cognito*.” (163)

¹⁰ By “phases,” Frye does not mean all comedies somehow pass through each phase. Rather, he means something more like shades of the color spectrum, and certain works can exhibit one or more of these shades, or “phases,” and other works exhibit others.

- ¹¹ A deeper irony arises from the fact that Socrates digs his most outlandish ironic praises into the speech of Agathon, his love.
- ¹² Nightingale (1995, 88–89) describes in this dialogue his allowing poetry a limited role.
- ¹³ See especially the Introduction in Nightingale 1995.
- ¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway and William Wordsworth are two notorious examples.
- ¹⁵ A firmer chronology of his works would be helpful here. See Brandwood 1992.

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The *Night* of Michelangelo: Animism, Empathy, and Imagination¹

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Abstract: This study investigates aesthetic responses to Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculpture *Night* with a focus on the concepts of animism and imagination. Accounts left by Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi (1517–1570), Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), and Michelangelo Buonarroti himself (1475–1564) describe this statue as if it were a living human. These reactions not only exemplify the phenomenon of animism and the notion of the “power of images”, but also highlight the role of the beholder's imagination in aesthetic response. In this sense, this study analyses the correlation between the aesthetic features of *Night* and Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo's responses to the sculpture, offering a fresh interpretation of this interaction from a neuroaesthetic perspective. Recent neuroscientific and neuroaesthetic research on the perception of human figures in movement – both in person and in depictions – may shed new light on the way we engage with figures such as Michelangelo's *Night*, identifying the brain areas that may be involved in this type of contemplation and the role of the beholder's imagination in these responses.

Keywords: Animism, ekphrasis, embodied simulation, empathy, imagination, naturalism, power of images, rhetoric, theory of response.

Introduction

In *Moses of Michelangelo*, Sigmund Freud (1914, 221) writes about his personal experience with works of art:

Works of art do exercise a *powerful* effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture.... This has occasioned me, when I have been *contemplating* such things, to spend a long time before them trying to *apprehend them in my own way*, i.e. to explain to myself *what their effect is due to*...some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against *being moved* by a thing without knowing *why I am thus affected* and *what it is that affects me*.²

In this passage, Freud touches on an important aspect of art perception: the aesthetic experience and enjoyment that follows the observation of artistic forms. Today, modern neuroscience techniques can shed light on the way viewers process works of art, and this makes Freud's idea worthy of pursuit. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions: (i) Why do works of art exercise power over their beholders? (ii) What are the effects of works of art due to? and (iii) Is it possible to comprehend works of art by pure contemplation?

The phenomenon of the power of images in visual works of art has a long history and has emerged in different contexts and time periods with similar modalities. Many cases of powerful images have been explored by scholars, but one in particular has been overlooked: the attribution of life to *Night* (Figure 1), a marble sculpture created by Michelangelo Buonarroti between 1525 and 1531.³ This case has particular historical relevance, involving a member of an influential Florentine family, Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi, and two preeminent Renaissance artists, Giorgio Vasari and Michelangelo himself. The three beholders under examination in this study are a

useful source through which to investigate the power of Michelangelo's *Night*, the phenomenon of animism (that is, the tendency to attribute life to statues), and the role of empathy and imagination in aesthetic response. In this study, I will consider two specific subjects: (i) the formal appearance of the work in question and (ii) the human brain-body system that is affected in one way or another by the power of the images observed by the viewer and that responds to this in a particular way. In this sense, I will analyse the aesthetic responses to Michelangelo's *Night* by focusing specifically on animism, the power of images, naturalism, empathy, and imagination – also considering the sub-personal implications of such responses.



Fig. 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Night*, 1525–1531, marble (155 x 150 cm), New Sacristy, Basilica of St Lawrence, Florence.

1. The Case of Michelangelo's *Night*

An excellent yet overlooked case study through which to examine the phenomenon of animism is the aesthetic responses to Michelangelo's marble statue *Night* – placed in the New Sacristy of the Medici Chapel in the Basilica of St. Lawrence in Florence, Italy – from Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo himself.

Michelangelo designed and largely executed the sculptural programme of the Medici Chapel. The tombs and statues of Dukes Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici are located at the chapel's east and west walls, respectively, along with the four *Times of Day* – *Night*, *Day*, *Dawn*, and *Dusk* – with one pair of figures reclining on each tomb. This study focuses on *Night*, which is located atop Giuliano's tomb.⁴ The statue depicts a nude woman lying, almost sitting, on an irregular support. The figure's left leg and right arm form two tangent triangles that have the function of supporting the reclined head, lost in a deep sleep, and frame a third triangle formed by the midsection. It is this third triangle – positioned in the middle of the figure – that is the focal point on which the beholder is meant to concentrate, given the recumbent position of the figure and the triangle's location slightly above the average height of an observer.

In addition to its posture and closed eyes, other elements indicate that this sculpture depicts a sleeping woman. The statue is surrounded by a series of symbols including an owl under its left leg, representing the night; a wreath under its left foot, representing sleep; and a mask under its left shoulder, which may signify the dream state.⁵

Since their creation, or perhaps even during their design, Michelangelo referred to the four *Times of Day* statues as living beings, as illustrated by the following inscription written on one of his plans for the Medici Chapel's sculptural programme, a red-chalk sketch of three pilaster bases:

Night and Day speak, and they say: We have with our swift course led Duke Giuliano to his death, and it is only just that he has his revenge for it, as he does. And the revenge is this: that we, having brought about his death, he, thus dead, has taken the light from us, and with closed eyes, has sealed our own, which no longer shine upon the Earth. What would he have done with us then while he lived?⁶

In these lines, Michelangelo refers to the sculptures *Day* and *Night*, adopting a literary *topos*, namely that of the “speaking” sculpture.⁷ The allusion to *Night* as a “living” sculpture also clearly emerges in Vasari's description of the statue in the *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550 and 1568):

In that statue is infused all the somnolence that is seen in sleeping forms; wherefore many verses in Latin and rhymes in the vulgar tongue were written in her praise by persons of great learning.⁸

In stating that *Night* possesses the same somnolence of sleeping people, Vasari refers to a short poem by Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi, written around 1545 after Strozzi observed the statue:

The Night that you see sleeping
In such loveliness, was by an angel carved
In this rock; and by her sleeping she has life;
Waken her, if you disbelieve; and she will speak to you.⁹

In these verses, Strozzi describes the sculpted figure as if it were a living being. He does so by attributing it life on the basis of it being dormant. Furthermore, he encourages the sceptical beholder – who may not believe in the “liveliness” of the statue – to wake it up, stating that, once awake, the statue will respond. It is likely that Strozzi was unaware of Michelangelo's statement written on the red-chalk drawing. However, there is a curious uniformity between their responses – as well as Vasari's – in considering the statue animate. Moreover, continuing Strozzi's dialogue, Michelangelo replied with a second rhyme, speaking this time as if he were the *Night*:

I prize my sleep, and more my being stone,
As long as hurt and shamefulness endure.
I call it lucky not to see or hear;
So do not wake me, keep your voice down!¹⁰

In this passage, Michelangelo again confirms *Night*'s “living” status by identifying himself with the statue and asking Strozzi not to disturb his (or her) sleep with his flattery.¹¹ For the sake of clarity, it is worth noting that Vasari, Strozzi, and Michelangelo did not describe the sculpted figure as a living being in the biological sense but as a “living” sculpture, as the words “statue”, “rock”, and “stone” in the three passages suggest. In this way, the human qualities are only transferred – or projected – onto the inanimate object metaphorically.

Based on Strozzi's, Vasari's, and Michelangelo's responses – alongside some naturalistic features of *Night* – it is worth addressing the following questions: (i) Why do viewers react to this sculpture as if to a living being? (ii) What do observers mean when they describe the statue as alive? (iii) Do viewers really experience the same empathetic engagement with this work of art as they would with a living person? These subjects will be discussed in the following sections.

2. The Concept of Animism

The tendency to attribute life to inanimate objects in general and pieces of art in particular has a long tradition dating back to classical antiquity.¹² For example, Virgil wrote about “breathing” sculptures both in *Georgics* (29 BC) – “Here in Parian marble shall stand statues breathing life”

(III, 34)¹³ – and in *Aeneid* (29–19 BC) – “Others, I doubt not, shall with softer mould beat out the breathing bronze, coax from the marble features to the life” (VI, 847).¹⁴

The *topos* of “living” statues is also present in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* (77 AD). In one passage, Pliny describes a bronze statue of a hound, writing that its naturalism is so impressive that the dog seems alive:

The art rose to incredible heights in success and afterwards in boldness of design. To prove its success I will adduce one instance, and that not of a representation of either a god or a man: our own generation saw on the Capitol, before it last went up in flames burnt at the hands of the adherents of Vitellius, in the shrine of Juno, a bronze figure of a hound licking its wound, the miraculous excellence and absolute truth to life of which is shown not only by the fact of its dedication in that place but also by the method taken for insuring it; for as no sum of money seemed to equal its value, the government enacted that its custodians should be answerable for its safety with their lives.¹⁵ (XXXIV, 38)

The literary *topos* of “living” sculptures experienced a revival in the Late Middle Ages – when classical rhetoric was taken as a model by the humanists – becoming a recurring element of the ekphrasis.¹⁶ For instance, Petrarch adopted this *topos* several times in his texts. In his *Letters on Familiar Matters* (1325–1361) – specifically the one addressed *To Francesco, of the Church of the Holy Apostles, on the preciousness of time* – Petrarch describes statue of St. Ambrose (located in the Basilica of St. Ambrose in Milan) as almost alive and breathing:

Meanwhile I am living in the western outskirts of the city near the basilica of St. Ambrose. My dwelling is very comfortable, located on the left side of the church, facing its leaden steeple and the two towers at the entrance; in the rear, however, it looks upon the city walls and in the distance fertile fields and the Alps covered with snow, now that summer is past. Nevertheless, the most beautiful spectacle of all, I would say, is a tomb which I *know* to be that of a great man, unlike what Seneca says of Africanus, “I believe it to be the grave of a great man”. I gaze upwards at his statue, standing on the highest walls, which it is said closely resembles him, and often venerate it as though it were alive and breathing. This is not an insignificant reward for coming here, for the great authority of his face, the great dignity of his eyebrows and the great tranquillity in his eyes are inexpressible; it lacks only a voice for one to see the living Ambrose.¹⁷ (*Fam.* XVI, 11)

In another letter – the one addressed *To his Lelius, that one must not seek false glory, just as one must not scorn true glory* – Petrarch mentions the representation of the breathing face of Caesar Augustus on a coin:

I gave him as a gift some gold and silver coins bearing the portraits of our ancient rulers and inscriptions in tiny and ancient lettering, coins that I treasured, and among them was the head of Caesar Augustus, who almost appeared to be breathing.¹⁸ (*Fam.* XIX, 3)

Petrarch also makes use of the *topos* of “living” statues in his *Letters of Old Age* (1361–1374). In the letter addressed *To Pietro Bolognese [da Muglio], rhetorician, on the Venetian victory*, Petrarch writes that the hooves of the bronze horses of the Basilica of St. Mark in Venice can be heard clattering:

By this time the doge himself [Lorenzo Celsi] with a huge retinue of nobles had taken his place before the church facade above the vestibule; from this marble dais everything was beneath his feet. It is the place where those bronze and gold horses stand, as though copied from life and stampeding from above, of ancient workmanship by a superb artist, whoever he was.¹⁹ (*Sen.* IV, 3)

Given the widespread use of the *topos* of “living” statues from classical antiquity to the Late Middle Ages, Strozzi’s, Vasari’s, and Michelangelo’s verses must be interpreted in light of the revival of classical rhetoric in the humanistic tradition, which attributes life to naturalistic representations of humans and animals.

The significance of the phenomenon of animism is reflected in the special attention it has been granted by two more modern thinkers: David Hume and Sigmund Freud. In *Natural History of*

Religion (1757), Hume (1889, 11) recognises that animism is a universal phenomenon that emerges not only in real life but also in literature:

There is a universal tendency amongst mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice and good will to everything that hurts or pleases us. Hence the frequency and beauty of the *prosopopoeia* in poetry, where trees, mountains, and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment of passion.

According to Hume, the tendency to regard objects as living beings is mainly due to the human inclination to extend human qualities to things we encounter, a process often referred to as anthropomorphism. It follows that the way Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo responded to the figure of *Night* is deeply rooted and meaningful, in the sense that it derives from an innate human tendency to anthropomorphise.

In the chapter “Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts” in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1913, 75) offers the following definition of animism:

Animism is, in its narrower sense, the doctrine of souls, and, in its wider sense, the doctrine of spiritual beings in general. The term “animatism” has also been used to denote the theory of living character of what appear to us to be inanimate objects, and the terms “animalism” and “manism” occur as well in this connection.

Therefore, animism refers to something (or someone) that is alive and gifted with the ability to move independently. The meaning of the word has subsequently been extended to signify any (inanimate) object regarded as alive, a practice that dates back to primitive times:

What led to the introduction of these terms was a realisation of the highly remarkable view of nature and the universe adopted by the primitive races of whom we have knowledge, whether in past history or at the present time. They people the world with innumerable spiritual beings both benevolent and malignant; and these spirits and demons they regard as the causes of natural phenomena and they believe that not only animals and plants but all the inanimate objects in the world are animated by them. (Freud 1913, 75–6)

As Freud (1913, 77) indicates, the attribution of life to inanimate objects may coincide with the formation of early speculations about the existence of the soul:

It has been regarded as perfectly natural and not in the least puzzling that primitive man should have reacted to the phenomena which aroused his speculations by forming the idea of the soul and then of extending it to objects in the external world.

In this sense, “animism came to primitive man naturally and as a matter of course” (Freud 1913, 91).

On these grounds, we can posit that Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo projected living characteristics onto a marble sculpture because of a natural instinct that is distinct to human beings. The nature of animism may explain the empathic engagement that beholders establish with human figures depicted in works of art, as illustrated by the responses to *Night* by Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo. This has also been suggested by David Freedberg (1989, 191), who, in *The Power of Images*, states that “we empathise with an image because it has or shows a body like the ourselves; we feel close to it because of its similarity to our own physique and that of our neighbours”.

3. On Naturalism

Certain naturalistic features of Michelangelo’s *Night*, such as the face and folds of the belly, may be related to the aesthetic responses of Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo to this statue. In this sense, it is worth mentioning an episode described in antiquity that is analogous to the

aesthetic responses of Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo to *Night*. In *Silvae* (c. 89–96 AD), Statius (2003, 126–7 (Il. 2. 64)) employed the verb “to animate” (*animare*) to praise Apelles’ craftsmanship, which was so masterful that it seemed as though he was able to give a soul to the figures depicted in his paintings. It is in this light that Strozzi’s, Vasari’s, and Michelangelo’s responses should be interpreted, in connection to Michelangelo’s extraordinary artistry in rendering naturalistic figures. In claiming that the statue *Night* possesses attributes of life or alluding to such details, it seems that they wanted to emphasise the greatness of Michelangelo’s artistic ability to render a figure in a realistic manner, in a way that the viewer is led to imagine the statue sleeping, dreaming, and living.

It follows that the power of *Night* lies in some of its naturalistic features. In art, power can be defined as a force that acts on beholders by means of specific forms. This force may elicit an empathic response in the beholder, who may automatically and internally mirror the motions or emotions represented in the figures – a phenomenon that has been observed by the activation of specific brain networks in beholders.²⁰

In this sense, the corporeality of *Night* may elicit an empathic response in the viewer, similar to the one that (s)he would feel in front of a living presence. As Nelson Goodman (1976, 34) states in *Languages of Art*: “What counts here is not how closely the picture duplicates an object but how far the picture and object...give rise to the same responses and expectations”. Addressing this same issue, Thomas Puttfarcken (1985, ix) expresses the necessity of a distinction “between the way we perceive pictures (and the effect they have on us) and the way we perceive and are affected by the real world around us”. In this matter, Freedberg (1989, 438) echoes Puttfarcken, saying that “to respond to a picture or sculpture ‘as if’ it were real is little different from responding to reality as real”. I add further nuance to this view by arguing that this difference would be minimised – but not reset – by the automatic activation of the beholder’s imagination, as the embodied simulation theory seems to suggest.²¹ According to this theory, when a beholder contemplates the representation of a suggested goal-directed movement, (s)he is potentially able to imagine, by a process of embodied simulation, the entire movement, starting from the single fraction of time represented in the picture. It is in this sense that responses to reality and to the representation of reality are similar – though not the same – inasmuch as the activation of the imagination would be stronger in the latter case.

The fact that responses to naturalistic representations are similar to responses to real situations does not mean that beholders truly believe that the works of art they are observing are living beings. To Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo, for instance, the marble figure is not a sleeping woman, but a sculpture that depicts a sleeping woman with extreme accuracy. It is precisely here that imagination comes into play. Perception is not just a matter of observing or sensing, but also a matter of imagining: When someone observes a sculpture representing a sleeping woman, as in this case, (s)he is led to imagine a real woman who sleeps and breathes.

4. From *Einfühlung* to Empathy and “Feeling-into”

In the previous section, I stated that the power of an image is revealed by the empathic relationship that beholders establish with the work of art they are observing. The subject of this section reviews this relationship, termed *Einfühlung* during the nineteenth-century German movement of psychological aesthetics, *Kunstwissenschaft*.²²

In *On the Optical Sense of Form* (1873), Robert Vischer (1994) was one of the first to theorise the notion of *Einfühlung* (literally, “feeling-in”). In 1908, Edward B. Titchener (1908) translated the German term *Einfühlung* as “empathy”. In the same year, James Ward also suggested “empathy” as a translation of *Einfühlung*.²³ Subsequently, the term “empathy” became accepted by the academic community as the translation of *Einfühlung* – meaning the capacity to “feeling-into” observed forms, both in art and in nature (Lanzoni 2018, 9).

In commenting on a section of Albert Scherner's book, *The Life of the Dream*, Vischer (1994, 92) formulates his own definition of empathy as the projection of one's own bodily form into an object's form:

Particularly valuable in an aesthetic sense is the section on *Die symbolische Grundformation für die Leibreize* (*Symbolic Basic Formation for Bodily Stimuli*). Here it was shown how the body, in responding to certain stimuli in dreams, objectifies itself in spatial forms. Thus, it unconsciously projects its own bodily form – and with this also the soul – into the form of the object. From this I derived the notion that I call “empathy” [*Einfühlung*].

Therefore, in empathy, the beholder extends him- or herself into the contemplated object. According to Vischer (1994, 104), to contemplate an object means to “mediate its size with my own, stretch and expand, bend and confine myself to it”.

However, the term *Einfühlung* originated with Arthur Schopenhauer and Johann Herder.²⁴ In the 1870s, Vischer brought the notion of *Einfühlung* into aesthetic discussion.²⁵ Then, in *Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense-Feelings* (1903), Theodor Lipps adopted Robert Vischer's notion of *Einfühlung*. Lipps (1979, 374–5) described *Einfühlung* as the projection of one's own self into the perceived figure, to the point of experiencing the movement performed by that figure:

The *object* of my activity is not my own activity, which is different from the observed one, but only this activity which I behold. I feel active in the movement or in the moving figure, and through projecting myself into it I feel myself striving and performing this same movement.

Another idea is that standing in a large space makes one feel expansive:

In viewing a large hall, I feel an inner “expansion”, my heart “expands”: I have this peculiar sense of what is happening within me. Connected with it are muscle-tensions, perhaps those involved in the expansion of the chest. To be sure, they do not exist for my consciousness, so long as my attention is directed to the spacious hall. (Lipps 1979, 377)

One of the most important achievements in the study of the *Einfühlung* response, or the ability to feel-into objects, is the concept of embodiment – that is, the way the observer's body is affected by the perceived object. From Vischer's passages it is possible to deduce a clear definition of embodiment – that is, a bodily sensation felt as a consequence of a visual experience fulfilled in a given context. To Vischer, the object is perceived not so much with the eyes but with the senses. In other words, it is perceived with a specific part of the body that corresponds to what one observes:

We can often observe in ourselves the curious fact that a visual stimulus is experienced not so much with our eyes as with a different sense in another part of our body. When I cross a hot street in the glaring sun and put on a pair of dark blue glasses, I have the momentary impression that my skin is being cooled off. Similarly, we speak of “loud colours” because their shrillness does indeed induce an offensive sensation in our auditory nerves. In rooms with low ceilings our whole body feels the sensation of weight and pressure. Walls that have become crooked with age offend our basic sense of physical stability. The perception of exterior limits to a form can combine in some obscure way with the sensation of my own physical boundaries, which I feel on, or rather with, my own skin. (Vischer 1994, 98)

Thus, according to Vischer, a person's experience of certain situations may elicit discordant responses from the body depending on the context. For instance, the response to a sunny view on a hot day through a pair of sunglasses (which produce a visual illusion) may correspond to a feeling of freshness in the body; in some instances, the vision of colours may affect the auditory nerves. However, other responses may be possible. Inside a restricted space, one may have a sensation of weight and pressure; inside a misshapen environment our physical stability could be compromised; the observation of the exterior limits of a form may have some implications for our sensations of our own bodily boundaries. In short, Vischer (1994, 99) argues that in perception “the whole body is involved; the entire physical being is moved”.

Similar considerations are advanced by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Daybreak* (1881). Nietzsche (2019, 89) examines the notion of sympathy as it relates to the phenomenon of inner imitation – that is, the sensation that often occurs when one observes someone else doing something:

To understand another person, that is, *to imitate his feelings in ourselves*, we do indeed often go back to the *reason* for his feeling thus and thus and ask for example: *why* is he troubled? – so as then for the same reason to become troubled ourselves; but it is much more usual to omit to do this and instead to produce the feeling in ourselves after the *effects* it exerts and displays on the other person by imitating with our own body the expression of his eyes, his voice, his walk, his bearing (or even their reflection in word, picture, music). Then a similar feeling arises in us in consequence of an ancient association between movement and sensation, which has been trained to move backwards or forwards in either direction. We have brought our skill in understanding the feeling of others to a high state of perfection and in the presence of another person we are always almost involuntarily practising this skill. (II. 142)

Therefore, according to Nietzsche, what we call empathy may occur either consciously – that is, when we ask ourselves the reason for someone else's sadness – or unconsciously – when one does not wonder about others' emotive states but just feels them as a consequence of an (inward) imitative faculty that appears to be natural and automatic.

It is in conceiving this process of perception that Vischer, Lipps, and Nietzsche introduced, without mentioning the term, the idea of embodied simulation, which has been developed recently in cognitive neuroscience.

5. Embodied Simulation and Mirror Neurons

Since the 1990s, embodied cognition has occupied scholars from different disciplines ranging from philosophy to cognitive neuroscience to artificial intelligence. In neuroscience, the notion of embodied cognition came to prominence with the work of Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991). The principal idea behind embodied cognition is that perception involves the motor system and reflects our body-based interactions with the environment.

From neuroscientific studies, it emerges that the whole-body expression of emotions regulates social interactions (De Gelder 2015). To perceive a bodily expression of an emotion means (most of the time) to react or to prepare to react to it. For this reason, the human ability to understand the meaning of the actions performed by others is the foundation of social life. As Beatrice de Gelder (2015, 81) stated:

The meaning of the action is what the agent has in mind when intending, planning, and performing the action... To understand an action means to understand it in relation to the intention of the agent in planning and performing that action.

Humans continuously and automatically absorb a wide range of social signals including facial expressions, gaze signals, head movements, gestures, postures, body shape, whole-body movements, and the use of personal and shared space. At first, the brain processes these signals at an unconscious level, after which point the signals are consciously recognised and reflected on (De Gelder 2015). Empirical research has pointed to the brain's network of mirror neurons as the underlying neural basis for the production and perception of social signals. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies indicate that mirror neuron activity is connected to the ability to represent others' goals by observing their motor actions (Gallese 2014; Gallese 2007; Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti 2004; Gallese et al. 1996; and Rizzolatti et al. 1996). Mirror neurons are increasingly thought to be relevant to the explanations of a number of other perceptual phenomena including perception of speech, music, and visual works of art, and this may shed light on a broad range of abilities and deficits, including empathy, altruism, emotion, theory of mind, imitation, and autism spectrum disorder.

Observation of an action, via activation of the brain's parietal and premotor cortices, triggers a representation of that action. This suggests that the mirror neuron system underlies observers' ability to understand the intentions and emotions of others. For this reason, mirror neurons play a core role in mediating human intentions, actions, and movements (executed, imagined, and perceived) and the relationship among them. This realisation has led to the formulation of several theories with mirror neurons as a foundational component: simulation, theory of mind, embodiment, and direct perception theories.

There are some iconic body postures and movements, most of which have also been depicted in the visual arts. For example, raised arms are often associated with grief and desperation. When a figure's arms are pointed skyward, we expect other body parts to be in specific configurations. This ability to predict – which is rooted in the concept of empathy – has a scientific foundation. Understanding empathy and intersubjectivity requires understanding that “highly developed animals have adapted to living in social groups with very complex patterns of social interactions and that they depend on these stable interaction patterns for survival” (De Gelder 2015, 83). Comprehending the meaning of other people's behaviour is a fundamental aspect of group communication. Our day-to-day observations mainly concern the actions and interactions of other people (Barresi and Moore 1996). In fact, a relevant portion of daily life is spent watching, interpreting, and reacting to the motions and emotions of others.

The discovery of mirror neurons allowed scholars to understand the means by which humans can understand each other's minds. People understand the actions that they observe in others by activating the neural network of those actions themselves. In other words, human capacity for social interaction has its roots in the process in the brain by which people automatically mirror the actions of others. Vittorio Gallese (2019, 115) explained this mirror mechanism in terms of motor simulation: “In many circumstances, we do not explicitly ascribe intentions to others; we simply detect them by means of motor simulation, that is, by activating part of the motor system without moving”. In observing (or imagining) a subject performing a goal-oriented action, the observer inwardly simulates this action him- or herself. This is why, in these cases, Gallese speaks about embodied simulation.

It is in this light that the ideas of Vischer, Lipps, and Nietzsche assume a new and deeper meaning. As these thinkers predicted, the self and the other mirror one another. Moreover, as neuroscientific data shows, this mirroring relates directly to the ongoing emotional states of the observer: the motions and emotions observed in the perceived subject or object (as in the case of works of art) act as stimuli that modify the beholder's corporeal and emotional states (Gallese 2019; and Gallese and Cuccio 2015).

6. Sleep and Breath

In Michelangelo's *Night*, the midsection of the figure is likely to be the focus on which the viewer concentrates. This is due to the recumbent position of the sleeping woman and the fact that the midsection is located slightly above the average height of an observer. The folds in the abdomen – created in a naturalistic way by the awkward position of the figure – could further draw the observer's attention.

One significant fact that emerges from studies of mirror neurons is that, when in the presence of others, observers tend to synchronize their movements to match those of the person being watched (Oberman and Ramachandran 2007, 312). For instance, individuals are inclined to mimic the gestures, body postures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and pronunciation patterns of others (Oberman and Ramachandran 2007). Mirror neurons can also shed light on the relationship between the breathing patterns of the observer and the observed (Oberman and Ramachandran 2007; McFarland 2001; and Paccalin and Jeannerod 2000). If an observed subject is breathing

quickly and heavily, for example, the observer will likely mirror that breathing pattern (Oberman and Ramachandran 2007; McFarland 2001; and Paccalin and Jeannerod 2000). On this basis, I argue that mirror neurons may also be activated during the observation of *Night's* midsection, as an attempt to detect movement in the abdomen of the sculpture that originates from breath.

Given that the ability to predict future events is a fundamental part of human cognition, we may suppose that the beholder observing *Night* would be inclined to look for abdominal or diaphragmatic swelling and deflation in connection with breathing.²⁶ In the process of perceiving a sleeping figure, the detection of breath-related movements is of crucial importance, inasmuch as it indicates to the observer that the person in front of him or her is not deceased but simply sleeping. In Michelangelo's sculpture, the abdomen serves as a main focal point, causing the viewer to imagine – consciously or unconsciously – that the marble figure is breathing and sleeping, and therefore alive.

Considering the neuroscientific research on the role of mirror neurons and prediction error minimisation in visual perception, the beholder would respond to the folds of the abdomen of *Night* as they would to a human breathing pattern. It is in this sense that Strozzi, Vasari, and Michelangelo, we may assume, experienced the living presence of an inanimate figure, possibly by imagining its diaphragm moving in accordance with the activity of breath. After all, in his psychoanalytic interpretation of Michelangelo's *Moses*, Freud already recognised the role of the beholder's imagination in responding to the actions of immobile figures. By referring to the gesture of *Moses's* right arm, Freud (1914, 224) states: "In imagination we complete the scene of which this movement, established by the evidence of the beard, is a part".

Neuroscientists have conducted experimental studies demonstrating that imagining a movement, observing a movement (both in artistic depictions and in reality), and executing a movement all activate, to some extent, the same patterns of neural activity.²⁷ These results contribute further to this paper's argument – namely that the contemplation of a figure (or specific parts of that figure) such as Michelangelo's *Night* tends to make the beholder forget, if only momentarily, the demarcations between inanimate art and life.

Conclusion

In this study, I focused on the aesthetic responses and the attribution of life to Michelangelo Buonarroti's *Night* by three well known figures of the Italian Renaissance: Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi, Giorgio Vasari, and Michelangelo himself. I accomplished this task by analysing written records of the reactions of those who described Michelangelo's *Night* as a living being in connection with the rhetorical tradition of attributing life to inanimate objects. Then, I connected these responses to the nature of animism, a phenomenon with ancient origins that has maintained similar characteristics across different historical contexts. As described by Hume and Freud, beholders respond to inanimate objects as if they were alive, projecting uniquely human characteristics onto them. In this sense, I identified the power of Michelangelo's *Night* in the naturalistic representation of sleep, which caused (and still causes) viewers to establish an empathic relationship with *Night*. Finally, exploring the concept of embodied simulation and the function of mirror neurons, I provided insight into the neuroscientific research on action and emotion perception in order to explain what may happen in the brain-body system of a beholder focused on the breathing pattern of another person. Specifically, beholders tend to mirror the breathing patterns of the perceived subjects because of the activation of mirror neurons. On this ground, I propose that the beholder tends to attribute life to the marble figure *Night* for at least four main reasons: (i) because of the natural human tendency to project human features onto inanimate objects; (ii) as a result of Michelangelo's virtuosity in rendering the somnolence of this statue; (iii) due to the activation of specific neural networks (such as the mirror neuron system) devoted to

the perception of bodies in motion even in static images and faculties (such as prediction error minimisation and imagination); and (iv) because of the capacity to relive, while gazing at the statue, earlier experiences with living beings.

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Notes

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Professor David Freedberg (Columbia University, New York) for his thoughtful comments on this text.

² Emphasis added.

³ The first and most comprehensive study on the power attributed to images in history is Freedberg 1989. The same phenomenon has also been explored, under the concepts of animism and agency, by numerous other scholars, such as Bredekamp 2017; Eck 2015; Papapetros 2012; Bussels 2012; Kessel 2011; Eck 2010; Mitchell 2006; Maniura and Shepherd 2006; Campbell 2002; Barkan 1981; and Hale 1976. See also Matthew Rampley's review of Horst Bredekamp's *Image Acts*, Rampley 2019; and Rampley 2021.

⁴ The identity of the figure represented in this sculpture is provided by Michelangelo's note on a study in red chalk for the pilaster bases in the Medici Chapel, which specifically mentions Duke Giuliano in conjunction with the allegories of *Day* and *Night*. For the red-chalk drawing, see Pöpper and Thoenes 2007, 641, fig. 365.

⁵ The owl as a symbol of night is mentioned by Borghini 1967, 65; and Condivi 1927, 64; whereas the wreath as a symbol of sleep and the mask as a symbol of dreaming is supported by Zöllner 2007a, 397; and Steinmann 1907, 86–7.

⁶ On the red-chalk drawing the inscription reads: “El Di e la Notte parlano, e dicono: Noi abbiamo col nostro veloce corso condotto alla morte el duca Giuliano; è ben giusto che e' ne facci vendetta come fa. E la vendetta è questa: Che avendo noi morto lui, lui così morto a tolto la luce a noi e cogli occhi chiusi ha serrato e nostri, che non risplendon più sopra la terra. Che arrebbe di noi dunche fatto, mentre vivea?”. Translated in Zöllner 2007b, 233. For the drawing, see fn. 4.

⁷ On this type of *topos*, see Burzer et al. 2010; Spagnolo 2006; Land 1986; Alpers 1960; Naselli 1952; and Ragghianti 1933.

⁸ Vasari 1966, 58: “Nella qual figura quella sonnolenza si scorge che nelle immagini adornate si vede. Per che da persone dottissime furono in lode sua fatti molti versi latini e rime volgari”. Translated in Vasari 1915, IX, 46. On Vasari's *Lives*, see Agosti, Ginzburg and Nova 2013; Gregory 2012; Pozzi and Mattiotta 2006; and Rubin 1995. On Vasari's biography of Michelangelo, see Barocchi 1984, 35–52.

⁹ Vasari 1966, 58: “La Notte, che tu vedi in sì dolci atti / Dormir, fu da uno Angelo scolpita / In questo sasso: e, perché dorme, ha vita. / Destala, se nol credi, e parleratti”. Translated in Zöllner 2007b, 236.

¹⁰ Vasari 1966, 59: “Grato mi è il sonno, e più l'esser di sasso, / Mentre che il danno e la vergogna dura. / Non veder, non sentir, m'è gran ventura; / Però non mi destar: deh, parla basso”. Translated in Zöllner 2007b, 236.

¹¹ On these verses, see Zöllner 2007b, 236.

¹² On this *topos* in light of rhetoric, see, among others, Baxandall 1971, 51–120; Lee 1967; and Spencer 1957.

¹³ Virgil 1999a, 178: “stabunt et Parii lapides, spirantia signa”. Translated in Virgil 1999a, 179.

¹⁴ Virgil 1999b, 592: “excudent alii spirantia mollius aera (credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus”. Translated in Virgil 1999b, 593.

¹⁵ Pliny the Elder 1938–1967, IX, 156: “Evecta supra humanam fidem ars est successu, mox et audacia. in argumentum successus unum exemplum adferam, nec deorum hominumve similitudinis expressae. aetas nostra vidit in Capitolio, priusquam id novissime confligaret a Vitellianis incensum, in cella Iunonis canem ex aere volnus suum lambentem, cuius eximium miraculum et indiscreta veri similitudo non eo solum

- intellegitur, quod ibi dicata fuerat, verum et satisfactione; nam quoniam summa nulla par videbatur, capite tutelarios cavere pro ea institutum publice fuit". Translated in Pliny the Elder 1938–1967, IX, 157.
- ¹⁶ On rhetoric in the humanistic tradition, see Cast 2009; and Goldstein 1991.
- ¹⁷ Petrarch 1933–1942, III, 203–6 (205): "Habito interim in extremo urbis ad occiduam plagam secus Ambrosii basilicam. Saluberrima domus est, levum ad ecclesie latus, que ante se plumbeum templi pinnaculum geminasque turres in ingressu, retro autem menia urbis et frondentes late agros atque Alpes prospicit nivosas estate iam exacta. Iocundissimum tamen ex omnibus spectaculum dixerim quod aram, quam non ut de Africano loquens Seneca, 'sepulcrum tanti viri fuisse suspicor', sed scio, imaginemque eius summis parietibus extantem, quam illi viro simillimam fama fert, sepe venerabundus in saxo pene vivam spirantemque suspicio. Id michi non leve precium adventus; dici enim non potest quanta frontis autoritas, quanta maiestas supercilii, quanta tranquillitas oculorum; vox sola defuerit vivum ut cernas Ambrosium". Translated in Petrarch 1975–1985, II, 317–19 (319).
- ¹⁸ Petrarch 1933–1942, III, 311–18 (315): "aliquot sibi aureas argenteasque nostrorum principum effigies minutissimis as veteribus literis inscriptas, quas in delitiis habebam, dono dedi, in quibus et Augusti Cesaris vultus erat pene spirans". Translated in Petrarch 1975–1985, III, 77–82 (79).
- ¹⁹ Petrarch 2002–2013, II, 57–69 (65): "Iam dux ipse cum immenso procerum comitatu frontem templi supra vestibulum occuparat, unde marmoreo e suggestu essent cuncta sub pedibus; locus est ubi quattuor illi enei et aurati equi stant, antiqui operis ac preclari, quisquis ille fuit, artificis, ex alto pene vivis adhinientes ac pedibus obstrepentes". Translated in Petrarch 1992, I, 132–6 (135).
- ²⁰ On the empathic responses of viewers to works of art, see, for instance, Tononi 2022; Tononi 2021; Tononi 2020a; Tononi 2020b; Tononi 2020c; Gallese 2019; Freedberg 2017; Freedberg 2014; Freedberg 2010; and Freedberg and Gallese 2007.
- ²¹ On the embodied simulation theory, see § 6.
- ²² On the *Kunstwissenschaft*, which investigated empathy and felt emotions in art, see Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994.
- ²³ See Lanzoni 2018, 9; and Lanzoni 2017.
- ²⁴ See Lanzoni 2018, 32.
- ²⁵ See Lanzoni 2018, 32.
- ²⁶ On prediction in visual perception, see Hohwy 2014; Clark 2008; and Helmholtz 1855.
- ²⁷ See, among others, Filimon et al. 2014; Decety and Grèzes 1999; Hari et al. 1998; Decety 1996; and Decety et al. 1994.

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The Aestheticism of Posthuman Body in Science Fiction Movies

YAPING LU

Abstract: Most science fiction movies (sci-fi movies) are focused on the imaginations of forms of future human beings and their living conditions, mainly including genetically modified people, cyborg, human cloning and artificial intelligence, thus shaping countless rich and creative posthuman landscapes. On the one hand, the aestheticism of posthuman body created in sci-fi movies is not only witnessing the carnival of new medium technologies as 3D, 4D, VR, AR and MR, but also illustrating the anxiety of humanism and the ideology and political demands hidden behind those various bodies. On the other hand, the images of posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies are not only predicting human beings' possible ways of future existence, but also indicating certain cultural events reflecting current issue of gender power, human subjectivity, technology hegemony, etc. By exploring the aestheticism of posthuman body in sci-fi movies, this article is trying to clarify what mechanism and strategy is applied and how ideological and political transmission is achieved in sci-fi movies, therefore providing useful thinking on current human condition from the perspective of literary study.

Keywords: aestheticism, posthuman body, sci-fi movies

Introduction

Since the Enlightenment era and the Industrial Revolution, technology has altered human beings' living conditions irreversibly. The emergence of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, quantum information technology, biotechnology, etc., has inspired the creation of hundreds of sci-fi movies depicting the relationship between humans and posthuman bodies, which can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. In the context of the human body being the source of artistic imagination, sci-fi movies break the boundaries of body technology and draw a grand future where all kinds of images as human beings, robots, replicas, human clones, cyborgs, etc., coexist. However, technology is, in Heidegger's words, "not an instrument", it is a way of understanding the world; it is "not a human activity", but develops beyond human control; it is "the highest danger", risking us to only see the world through technological thinking (Heidegger 1977, 3-35). Therefore, in the era when technology has rewritten the traditional existence of human beings and their social practices, conventional thinking of body aestheticism has also been challenged. By focusing on the posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies as *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), *The Matrix* (1999, 2003, 2003, 2021), *Replicas* (2018) etc., this article participates in the discussion of the specific connotations of the aestheticism of posthuman body based on the images and narratives in sci-fi movies, aims to interrogate current ontological disposition of human beings and explore the anxiety of humanism related to subjectivity, gender hierarchy, embodiment and disembodiment and man-computer symbiosis.

1. The Disintegration of Human Subjectivity

Human subjectivity is one of the main focuses of body aestheticism in ontological philosophy, which is involved with the question of "who am I"? To answer this question, one has to clarify and

confirm the relationship between oneself and the other and the outer world. While, in posthuman era, highly influenced by Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), one of the turning points of body aestheticism is the disintegration of human subjectivity, which is trying to subvert the anthropocentric views of human beings themselves.

Originated in ancient Greek, the idea of subjectivity first takes shape in Aristotle's "being", which has the characteristic of independent existence or ultimate-subject of prediction, having no necessary relation to human beings. It is not until Renaissance that human beings' subjectivity casts the shadow and sees the light. To put it another way, man sees himself of a purposeful universe of divine origin. The belief that human beings are "the soul of universe and the paragon of animals" significantly frees people's mind.

Correlatively, by denying and suspecting, Descartes claims, "I think, therefore I am", which refers to self-suspecting and emphasizes self-consciousness (reason), thus establishing the significance of "I think" and laying the foundation for the philosophy of subjectivity. Since then everything outside the subject is being defined as object and subject becomes the measure of all things. The capacity of man's rationality is enlarged to the degree that they can gain an absolute, objective divinely ordered rational scheme of things.

Later, Kant and Hegel have enriched the connotations of Descartes' subjectivity even further. Kant puts forward the concepts of theoretical rationality, practical rationality, aesthetic judgement, etc. What he emphasizes is that human person has the capacity of rationality for self-government and the moral worth that derives from it. While the focus of Hegel's subjectivity is absolute spirit which refers that spirit is not only as pure rational consciousness to construct self-cognition, but also the source of universe, regarding spiritual substance as the basis of everything. Therefore, to a large extent, the rapid expansion of subjectivity has led to the crisis of modern subjectivity and the emergence of anthropocentrism, arguing that human subjectivity is an irreducible creative source of meaning and value.

In a word, thanks to philosophers like Descartes, Kant, Hegel, etc., who have made great efforts in establishing a solid foundation for human beings' anthropocentric understanding of themselves, the core issue of human subjectivity of rationality, synthesis, determinism and essentialism has dominated social psychology for most of the past century. In other word, human subjectivity has been privileged above all the other lifeforms.

However, the emergence of new body, cyborg, has highly disorganized Cartesian universalism of subjectivity, dissipating the boundary between subject and object and subverting traditional comprehension of subjectivity. Created by scientists Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960 in an article *Cyborgs and Space*, cyborg is a compound word of cybernetics and organism, which means a combination of both biomechatronic and organic body parts. Cyborg is "a hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway 1990, 149), written by Donna Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1985). In the book, she first dissects the interconnectedness of human and technology. In Haraway's case, humanity has become so woven in with technology that it is hard to tell the boundaries between human, animal and technology, thus leading to hybrids and more complexities.

Drawing on Foucault, we can better understand the disintegration of human subjectivity. In the 1960s, Foucault ventures to proclaim that, "man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (Foucault 1970, 387) that our ontological understanding of human beings has been deconstructed. Foucault astoundingly puts forward that the concept of human beings is not transcendent but constructed by history and society.

No philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination and the passions, had ever encountered, in the 17th or 18th centuries, anything like man: for man did not exist (any more than life, language or labor) (*The Order of Things* 344).

In Foucault's system of philosophy, he made clear of the relationship between power and body, and power and knowledge, i.e. he asserts that subjectivity is constructed in knowledge and certainty is only possessed by knowledge; knowledge and power are inseparable in that power gives forth to knowledge and knowledge embodies power. To certain extent, human beings would be disintegrated if new system of knowledge and power emerged, which is foreseen by the development of artificial intelligence and biological technology.

On the one hand, by proposing counter-enlightenment(disintegrative) ideas of human subjectivity, philosophers like Foucault and Haraway have offered an alternative way to view ourselves, which has been illustrated in sci-fi movies. On the other hand, based on the standpoints of the counter-enlightenment philosophers, we are able to have an insight into the sci-fi movies that the disintegration of human subjectivity is achieved by cyborgs through two ways, the "technicalization" of human beings and the "consciousnization" of technology.

For one thing, the sci-fi movie, *Ghost in the Shell* echoes the philosophical thinking of the "technicalization" of human beings. As has been discussed that the ontological thinking of human subjectivity believes that human beings are created by God with divine image, which gives them a special dignity among all the works of creation. However, in *Ghost in the Shell*, thanks to the development of technology, human beings can create themselves with their own hands. Having had a terrible accident befall her, the heroine Motoko Kusanagi is rescued by Megatech, a company specializing in the production of high-tech cyborg. To be more specific, Megatech uses a fully prosthetic body to house her cyber brain, thus giving her a second life. Being a brand-new creation of her own kind, Motoko, to some extent, disintegrates what enlightenment philosophers' belief that human beings are God's divine creation.

Besides, the movie goes further in disintegrating human subjectivity by endowing humans with more power than God. In the movie, to have certain enhanced ability like clairvoyant or quick reaction, almost everyone can have part of his or her own body "augmented" and those who do not have any prosthetic interference are being despised. When Batou loses his eyes at a battle, he has his eyes "augmented", which enables him with better eyesight to see through sealed objects. And Motoko has her whole body "augmented", which enables her with enhanced senses, strength, reflexes, and strong material body, thus turning her into a better fighter. In this sense, human beings themselves not only play the role of God, but also transcend Him. At the same time, man is no longer the measure of all things, or the cream of universe because when non-human existence(cyborg) is regarded as better creation, ontological thinking of human subjectivity will be changed in its nature, and consequently losing its specific carrier.

For another, the exploration and analysis of sci-fi movies enables us to see that it is possible for cyborgs to develop self-thinking and consciousness, i.e. the "consciousnization" of technology, as depicted in *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner*(1982) and etc. The construction of traditional subjectivity is based on reason and regards human consciousness and cognition as the origin of all knowledge. Thus the establishment of human subjectivity is confirmed. Among all the qualities of human being, self-consciousness is the most essential one, which defines human beings as advanced species in accordance with the doctrine of traditional subjectivity. While the root of human subjectivity is being destroyed in that consciousness can exist outside of human body and human consciousness can be manipulated and implanted in posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies.

In *Ghost in the Shell*, Major Motoko undergoes a profound humanist crisis suspecting the real existence of her self-consciousness after she discovers that she is not unique. "What if a cyber brain could possibly generate its own ghost? Create a soul all by itself? And if it did, just what would be the importance of being human, then?" These questions reflect the Major's confusion of the existence of subjectivity and thinking of the meaning of being a human. Initially, the Major believes that "self" is spiritual existence based on individual's organic body, emotion and memory. But after discovering another cyborg same as herself and a bus driver with implanted memory, she starts to ponder over what Batou says, "every person has his own ghost." She claims that,

Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are... All of that goes into making me what I am, giving rise to consciousness that I call me. And simultaneously confining me within set limits.

In this sense, Motoko's physical body does exist as an ontological presence that defines her identity, but as an ensemble of body parts that provide an organic living system. Furthermore, she begins to question whether cyber brain has its own ghost, when she finds that the puppets have their own consciousness as well.

The movie *Blade Runner* also pushes the boundaries of what is considered "real" personhood. Replicants as Deckard, Roy and Racheal are synthetic humans with consciousness, thought and emotion, which are even more developed than human beings. In this sense, they are basically the same as human beings. This way of thinking prompts them to struggle to achieve what "real" human beings can achieve as living longer and love.

Therefore, when the development of technology frees consciousness from human brains, the foundation of self-existence is becoming unstable, thus the basis of traditional body aestheticism. By analyzing sci-fi movies, we come to realize that one of the major changes of body aestheticism in posthuman era is that it resonates the dismantle of humanist subject at the prospect of post-human society and represents human being's cultural anxieties and fears about the loss of coherent subjectivity.

2. The Subversion of Traditional Gender Role

By analyzing the sci-fi movies, we come to learn that the second turning point of the aestheticism of posthuman body is the subversion of traditional gender role. From ancient society to modern world, binary ideas like men/women, weakness/strength, self/other, etc., have been coded in the terms of human ideology, explaining the social realities and phenomena for centuries. Human beings' binary thinking logic not only helps build the gender boundary between men and women, but also distinguishes that women are sentimental, weak and submissive, while men are rational, strong and domineering. Specifically, an analysis of fictional representations of posthuman bodies provides us more details about the binary idea of gender role and ideal sites to examine what Althusser calls "real conditions of existence" (Althusser 123). As a pioneer in studying gender issues of cyborg, Haraway states that cyborg is a hybrid which erases various boundaries as human beings and animals, organism and machine, men and women, etc., and transcends the existing identity of race, class and gender. By analyzing the posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies, we find that the subversion of traditional gender role is mainly achieved in two ways, one is the ambiguity of biological sex, the other is the elimination of social gender.

Let's still take cyborgs for instance. Generally speaking, gender ambiguity of cyborgs in post-human sci-fi movies is first manifested in biological dimension known as "highly sexualized cyborg" and "two sexes combined in one cyborg". The former means that the characters in sci-fi movies have typical male and female physical characteristics, i.e. males have strong muscles as Murphy in *RoboCop* (1987), T-800 and T-1000 in *The Terminator* (1984) and females have wide hips and a distinctive bosom as Rachael in *Blade Runner* and T-X in *The Terminator*. Although having super-power, male cyborgs have their bodies "castrated" because what makes them strong is not their biological body but cyborg technology. However, the powerful cyborg bodies are not indestructible. When injured, they are forced to reveal their inner mechanical limbs, thus presenting a "Body-without-Organs" (BwO) in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's words. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the BwO refuses to accept the organization of the organism as stratum, as centralized, hierarchical, and patterned (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 158). In this sense, it is likely to regard cyborgs as a collection of "desiring-machines" which perform specific functions.

While "two sexes combined in one cyborg" signifies that male and female dual characteristics are combined in one cyborg, i.e. the cyborg is a male as well as a female. Let's still take *Ghost in the Shell* for instance. At the end of the movie, leaping on the back of the spider tank, Major Motoko attempts

to rip off the door on the tank's control panel. Audience witnesses several images with strong comparison, female image with wide hips and a distinctive bosom/male image with bulging muscles; torn tissue of organic skin/inorganic machinery and circuit devices. As we have seen, Major's body transcends the traditional archetypes of men and women. she is a woman, a man as well as a machine. In other words, the movie subverts the traditional boundary of gender, i.e. the hybridity breaks through the boundary between human and machine, male and female, which dismantles the binarism and categorical ways of thinking that have served the history of western culture.

Another example is Trinity in *The Matrix*, when she is with Neo whom she is in love with, the audience witnesses a tender and sexy female image; when she is fighting against the agent, she is a warrior with male valor and force. Female characters like them in sci-fi movies reverse traditional gender roles and transcend all the gendered body archetypes. They are also termed as "FemaleMan" by Haraway because they have the characteristics of both man and woman, which enables them to work with men sometimes exceed men. In a word, these cyborgs with combined male and female characteristics eliminate traditional dichotomies of gender and subvert gender boundaries that have dominated our ideology for a long time.

When Gayle Rubin created the phrase "sex/gender system", she reveals that, "(gender) is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin 2006). She distinguishes gender from sex by emphasizing that, "gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes" (Rubin 2006). Rubin reveals that patriarchal thinking establishes women as being weak, hysterical and submissive to men. Another feminist, Shulamith Firestone, added that women's oppression was acted out through control over women's physical difference of reproduction function. She argues that we should invest in advanced technology in order to free women from childbirth. In sci-fi movies, Firestone's wish is accomplished by the emergence of replicants, which can be seen in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). The movie tells us that replicants Racheal and Deckard have a child named Ana. But she is facing a severe danger because replicants' ability to reproduce biologically gives rise to human beings' (men's) fear of being replaced by women in other fields when the physical differences between men and women are less prominent. Celebrated also by Haraway, she asserts that postgendered subjects truly liberate women from patriarchy ideology, or in other words, eliminate social gender.

Furthermore, since replicants have subverted the physical differences between men and women, the metaphorical stereotypes of sexual difference as social identity and division of work is becoming unstable. In other words, it provides a challenge to anthropocentrism as well as phallogocentrism and promotes feminist movement, which is regarded as the myth of women's liberation or cyborg feminism by Haraway. As has been noticed that sci-fi movies at the early period of time had been men's movie, because on the one hand, the main characters in the movies are mostly male, appearing on the stage as superman, hero and savior, while female characters are restricted to be victims, tools even slaves. On the other hand, although female characters in the movies are given special charms, they are "Other" under male gaze, whose main purpose is to feed the sexual interest or agenda of the male characters and to reiterate feminine stereotypes.

As for female posthuman bodies in movies, they are also mainly "feminized" roles of inferiority, but what is unusual is that some of them do realize that they are being objectified for the pleasure of men. Pris in *Blade Runner* who is a "basic pleasure model" is created to provide entertainment for men. But her appearance is showing non-female charm with tousled hair, glazed skin like silica gel. Especially when saved by Sebastian, she deliberately smears herself with white powder, brushes black ink around her eyes and reveals her machine body to refuse to be a sexualized object of male desire. Talented with athletic and martial feats, she achieves her preliminary challenge against phallogocentrism by fighting against Deckard when haunted by him.

Rachael in *Blade Runner* is another example who gains female consciousness and subjectivity. She is a replicant with implanted memory, given elegant style and delicate look. Meanwhile, she is being

portrayed as an “Other” character who needs to be saved. In spite of this, however, when she realizes that Deckard is in danger fighting against Leon, she shoots Leon without hesitation. Furthermore, by choosing to live a new life with Deckard as a replicant, she challenges the paradigm that women should be dominated by men because they are not smart enough. Such characters in posthuman sci-fi movies invite us to see that we should “cancel out” the significance of everybody’s sexual specificity, which resonates with Stacy Alaimo’s concept of “trans-corporeality” aiming to give more attention to the underprivileged entities.

Additionally, due to the development of feminist movement in real life, female posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies yield such a reading that women are not submissive characters attached to men, but appear as main characters like heroines and warriors, revealing female posthumans’ unique charm. By analyzing such sci-fi movies with similar narratives, i.e. female leading characters are endowed with divine commissions to fight against evil power and achieve a happy ending with their superpower. Motoko in *Ghost in the Shell* is a female cyborg with robust body and superpower as well as a major of public security, a leading force in attacking criminal activities and carrying out justice. In doing so, the film reflects the Mayor’s outstanding ability of observation and judgement, which outshines other male cyborgs. Simultaneously, Alita in *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019) is another posthuman heroine who becomes a battle angel in fighting against the bully and helping the weak in order to improve the harsh life of the citizens in Iron City and oppose the violence of the sky city of Zalem. The last scene of the Motorball tournament in the movie when Alita raises her sword to the sky city and calls for action further proves that she is qualified to be a revolutionary leader.

Both Motoko and Alita come to know and accept their new selves in the process of fighting for justice. As the leading power against the evil, they highlight the spirit of independence, boldness and decisiveness, corresponding to Haraway’s ‘FemaleMan’. While Priz and Racheal appear to challenge traditional gender system at preliminary stage, Alita and Motoko transcend the paradigm of and limits on female body and eliminate the dichotomy of gender in a larger sense. In other words, posthuman bodies serve as representational figures of dismantling gender boundaries and structures of oppression and create a utopian aesthetic space devoid of gender inequity.

3. The Reflection on Embodiment and Disembodiment

Basically, the stating point of traditional body aestheticism is focused on natural body which is the material carrier of human mind as well as material tool for human will. But as the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty emphasized that there is no distinct separation between body and mind, which is why human beings constantly invest their desires and need in their bodies, and also why body has always been the center of posthuman discourse. In addition, being the main issue of embodiment and disembodiment, the processing of body has been established and discussed in philosophical tradition. Embodiment is emphasized on the importance of human body in activities. While disembodiment is used by transhuman to escape the limit of material body in cyberspace functioning as information without flesh. In this regard, sci-fi movies provide us with various images of embodiment and disembodiment and prompt us to think: will posthuman body develop and replace human beings or can material entity only exist in practical activities?

Traditional philosophy holds the view that mind and body are inseparable and the former is superior to the latter. While the digital turn has shuffled the status of body, putting it to a higher degree than mind. Following Merleau-Ponty, “our bodily experience of movement is not particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and object, with a ‘praktognosia’(practical knowledge), which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary”(Merleau-Ponty 2005, 162) In this sense, body is not simply an object or subject, but an entity of perception and communication, which echoes in the movie, *Surrogates* (2009). This movie foresees the possible consequences of over reliance on technology and refusing personal communication. In the near future, scientists invent remotely controlled androids, “surrogates”, which enable

everyone to live ideally at home. Human operators authorize their “surrogates” to work outside and communicate with others. However, when the main character, Tom, chooses to let the virus permanently paralyze surrogates worldwide, those highly homebound human beings have to step out of their homes, feeling confused and afraid, but also refreshed like a new born baby. As the line goes in the movie, “you can try to escape by living through a puppet through a machine, but deep down inside you know you’re living a lie.” The essence of human beings’ indulgence on surrogates is that they are chasing unrealistic safety instead of real existence, which is an annihilation to the materiality, sociality and practicality of human beings.

Although in virtual world people can project their mind onto their virtual body, their material body still can feel and understand activities, exerting a great importance in their consciousness in virtual world. Disembodiment in virtual world does not mean that the importance of one’s imbodyed consciousness is fading. In *Ready Player One*(2018), created by James Halliday and Ogden Morrow of Gregarious Games, OASIS is a virtual reality entertainment universe where people can escape the complicated real world and enjoy freedom. But only when dying does Holliday realize that all the fantasies in OASIS is unrealistic, and only in the real world can one enjoy a peaceful dinner and a warm embrace with his or her loved ones. Same as *Inception*(2010), extractors have to take drugs to help them take control of their dreams or be kicked from a height to be awake from a dream. In this regard, such movies invite us to believe that although people can receive more comforts in virtual space, perceptible body in real life is more important.

While, disembodiment means entirely removing the limit of material body from mind, thus making body redundant flesh. Philosophically, the problem of disembodiment dates back to mind and body dualism from the beginning of philosophy: Plato divides the world into the perceptual world and the rational world; the former understands the world by sensory experience like seeing, hearing, smelling and touching; while the latter emphasizes the rational ability of mind. In the context of posthuman, disembodiment is assumed as “superhuman” condition, which signifies that posthuman beings’ minds are improved to the level higher than the present human beings’. More importantly, consciousness can be unloaded and downloaded and exist in cyberspace as a certain information. In the movie *Transcendence*(2014), when Will’s material body dies, his wife uploads his consciousness into a quantum computer and connects it to the internet, leading it to grow in capacity and knowledge. Same as the ubiquitous Lucy in the movie *Lucy*(2014), whose brain capacity reaches 100% and promptly disappears, moving into the space continuum where she is everywhere; and Jobe Smith who enters Virtual Space Industries mainframe and becomes a digital being by abandoning his physical body in *The Lawnmower Man*(1992). In doing so, Jobe hopes to be existed as disembodied superhuman and control all computer systems of the world.

In this sense, the disembodied super-humanism as Will, Lucy and Jobe implies a bode fantasy of the development and application of computer science and artificial intelligence, holding that posthumans will be omnipotent by having their intelligence and computing speed largely improved. But the theoretical basis of this ideal vision is the omnipotence of technology, which entirely surrenders material body to technology, thus falling into technophilism. In this sense, this full affirmation of technology seems to deny the role of an almighty God on the surface, but in essence it hopes that human beings themselves will play this role under the blessing of technology. Disembodiment implies what Nietzsche calls “the will of power” with strong anthropocentrism and utopian color. For Katherine Hayles, super-humanism will not succeed in achieving immortality, because it is merely another absolutism or “new digital Cartesianism” in Megan Boler’s words.

Overall, embodied posthumanism is possessed with body which is the object of the material world, as well as mind a unity of consciousness and emotion. While disembodiment shows a desire to connect with others, positing body as non-necessary. Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” is then translated into “I connect therefore I am”, which is trying to get rid of the sociality and practicality of body. But as Hayles states that body should be regarded as the basis of human beings and not be caste.

4. The Imbalance and Balance of Human and Technology

Most sci-fi movies envision and explore the new living landscape and new social forms of human beings in the era of technology, bringing various possibilities of the development of human beings, machines and animals and discussing the coexisting modes with different objects, be it positive, pessimistic or objective. Correspondingly, what happens to posthuman bodies at the end of different sci-fi movies resonate what people think of new objects and the imbalance and balance of human beings and technology, representing the perspectives of human and those of posthuman respectively, thus another characteristic of the aestheticism of posthuman body.

One possible outcome of the development of technology is the alienation of technology which means that though technology is more and more bounded with human beings and infiltrated into every aspect of social life, human beings are more or less controlled and restricted by fast-evolving technologies. To think that living without a smartphone in contemporary China is impossible, particularly in the pandemic. Everyone has to show his or her health code and travel code to get home, let alone paying with QR code. As Rousseau says in *The Social Contract*, “(m)an was born free, and he is everywhere in chains. Those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they” (Rousseau 1968, 49). From a functional perspective, technology casts new light on human social life, largely liberating people from manual work and freeing up a great amount of time for them, but aren't human beings slaves to their own freedom either? First, the definition of freedom is not decided by the public, but mostly by the government, the media and the few elites, etc. So when people are chasing the latest electronic products, thinking they are free to buy whatever they want, it is hard to deny that they are not influenced by commercial advertisement. Second, in pursuit of freedom, people inevitably have to give up something, as security and stability in Truman's case in *The Truman Show* (1998). Marx and Engels agrees that, “all our discoveries and progress seem to result in material forces with rational life, while human life turns into dull material forces” (Marx and Engels 1972, 517). This is the state of the imbalance between human beings and technology where people are being enslaved without being conscious of it. Therefore, there is no doubt that some people still regard technology as a threat to them.

From this point on, in sci-fi movies, one simple way to illustrate human beings' fear of posthuman bodies is to depict them as evil powers against human beings' will. As in the movie *Blade Runner*, the replicants are originally created to undertake tough jobs that human beings can't handle or don't want to, but are announced illegal and being hunted after one of them has shot a blade runner. As a result, the rest four replicants are in desperate to fight against the hunter, Deckard, who is created by human beings to retire them. At the last scene of fighting against Deckard, replicant Roy delivers an astonishing monologue before he dies: “I have seen things people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain.” Human beings' obsession with the pursuit of advanced technology and genetic improvement, to a large extent, lead to the imbalance between human beings and posthuman bodies like the replicants in *Blade Runner*, which manifests human beings' fear of being replaced and wiped out by their own creation.

Another example is *Tron: Legacy* (2010) in which the Grid's corrupt ruling program, Clu, is dedicated to taking Flynn's “identity disc” and organizing his own program army to impose his idea of perfection on the human world. But due to the effort of Flynn, Sam and Quorra, Clu is destroyed, making the digital world peaceful again. Other posthuman movies like *Terminator*, *The Matrix*, *Upgrade* (2018) etc., are released with the similar idea, reflecting the consequences of the alienation of technology, i.e. technology is no longer a tool to serve human beings, but an alien force trying to gather power to overthrow human beings' control and dominate the world or the imbalance between human beings and technology. In this case, people's pessimistic view towards technology is vividly illustrated in those sci-fi movies in which tragedies are inevitable.

However, there are still some other people think positively that posthuman bodies are the next step for human evolution, because when the natural deficiencies like aging and death in human beings will be overcome and a coexistence of posthuman bodies and human beings will be realized. In this sense, people will agree with Katherine Hayles, “the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born” (Hayles 1999, 3). The positive thinking of posthuman bodies believes that the combination of human beings and technology will usher in a turning point for human beings’ next step of evolution.

From this point on, movies like *Avatar* (2009) represent human beings’ expectations for a harmonious coexistence with posthuman bodies. In *Avatar*, when Jake steps into Pandora, a habitable moon to the Na’vi, he is overwhelmed by the pure and harmonious atmosphere there. Growing to sympathize with the Na’vi, Jake chooses to fight with them to drive away human beings and transfer his human body to Pandora permanently, thus becoming one of the Na’vi. Instead of destroying one side, to some extent, Jake has resolved the conflicts between the two civilizations and helped them coexist. In this case, the movie offers us to regard Pandora as an utopia for positive thinking of posthumanism. Similar to this are *Transcendence* and *Lucy*. When human being, Will, allows the virus to be uploaded into the computer to repair the damage humans have done to the ecosystem, he also chooses to sacrifice himself for the sake of human beings as well as machines in *Transcendence*; when Lucy chooses to inject all the CPH4 to her body to reach 100% of her brain capacity, she also chooses to give up her natural body to preserve all the information humans have reserved from the beginning of history in *Lucy*.

As has been stated, it is possible to believe that humanism and the development of technology can be coexisted. In his article “Why Must Scientists Become More Ethically Sensitive Than They Used to Be?” (1998), John Ziman maintains that “as their (humans’) products become more tightly woven into the social fabric, scientists are having to perform new roles in which ethical considerations can no longer be swept aside” (Ziman 1998, 1813). Essentially, posthuman bodies are human beings’ products which are designed mostly to meet human’s needs under Asimov’s Three Laws of Robotics: a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first law; a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or the second law (Asimov 1950, 40). Although it is difficult for a robot to make a choice, if the three laws contradict within themselves, Asimov pictures a possible future for us to live harmoniously with other forms of life in posthuman era.

Conclusion

The body images in posthuman sci-fi movies not only reveal the logos center doctrine of human beings, but also the relationship between technology and discourse, illustrating the anxiety of humanism and the condition of posthuman condition. From *Ghost in the Shell* to *Blade Runner*, from cyborgs to replicas, posthuman bodies in sci-fi movies offer us various readings of human subjectivity, traditional gender roles, embodiment and disembodiment and the relationship between human beings and technology, which help us transcend the present condition to foresee and construct the system of new body aestheticism in posthuman era. In Rosi Braidotti’s words, “we need to visualize the (posthuman) subject as a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbors the animals and the earth as a whole” (Rosi 2013, 83). In many ways, posthuman bodies transcend the limits of human beings’ corporeality, encourage us to subvert anthropocentric ideology of body aestheticism, and embrace an intersubjective future with different entities.

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“But irony seems to me to dominate life”: The Romantic Longing for Absolute Love in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*

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Abstract: *Madame Bovary* is often celebrated as a typical Realist novel in that Flaubert, as a narrator, exposes the follies of Romanticism by detachedly, if not mercilessly, characterising Emma as a woman whose life is dominated by her harmful desire to materialise her idea(l) of love that she encounters in Romantic literature. Upon closer examination, however, we will see that Flaubert, as a person, seems to show strong compassion for Emma’s Romantic longing as an irony of life: “If *Bovary* is worth anything,” says Flaubert, “the book will not lack heart. Irony, though, seems to me to dominate life.” To further Flaubert’s insights into the irony of life, I draw on the Kantian sublime and Lacanian *jouissance* to explicate the nature of Romantic longing—the ironic discrepancy between infinite desire and finite satisfaction—and illustrate the ways in which such longing manifests itself in Emma and, surprisingly and ironically, in Charles, arguably the most down-to-earth and content character in the novel.

Keywords: Romantic longing, irony, *jouissance*, sublime, *passage à l’acte*

This woman [Emma], in reality, is very sublime in her kind, in her narrow world, besieged by restricted horizons.

— Charles Baudelaire, *Madame Bovary* (654)

Madame Bovary: Provincial Manners (1856) is often hailed as a Realist novel *par excellence* insofar as Flaubert exposed Romantic follies by detachedly portraying Emma as a woman who continuously endeavours to materialise in social reality the kind of romantic love she finds in Romantic literature and ends up committing suicide out of *weltschmerz*. Admittedly, as a narrator, Flaubert shows little mercy towards Emma, making her suicide a corollary of her follies. As a person, though, he seems in great sympathy with her struggle for an unattainable ideal. For one thing, Flaubert is said to have answered a question concerning the source of the character Emma by repeating, “Mme Bovary, *c’est moi!*—*D’après moi!*” (I think, Mme Bovary is me!) (Descharmes 103n). His identification with Emma particularly makes sense in terms of the insatiability from which they both suffer: “In his correspondence and travel diaries, Gustave shows that [like Emma] he was never able to enjoy the present—satisfaction always lay in the future, in things yet unattained” (Speziale-Bagliacca 66). For another, in a letter to his mistress Louise Colet, dated 9 May 1852, Flaubert states wistfully that “I’ve got compassion for lots of things where sensitive people did not. If *Bovary* is worth anything, the book will not lack heart. Irony, though, seems to me to dominate life” (Flaubert 1926, 407).

Indeed, Flaubert strewed irony—particularly, that which Claire Colebrook describes as “cosmic irony, or the irony of fate” (13)¹—throughout the novel. The story begins when Charles is a shy, clumsy school boy bullied by his new classmates after his father has tried to bring him up in a Spartan manner, and closes when Charles as a middle-aged conscientious doctor in Yonville dies alone from a broken heart while Monsieur Homais, a self-serving charlatan who has sabotaged Charles and

other doctors in the town, is awarded the Legion of Honour. In particular, it is in love that we encounter the greatest irony of life that Flaubert weaved into the novel. As Giles Mitchell points out, "Flaubert regarded love as an '*inassouvisable*' problem because while desire may be enormous, the sustenance provided by the world is 'paltry'" (124-25). In a similar vein, Per Bjørnar Grande suggests that Flaubert "creates a world where everything is strictly realistic" (76) while those who pursue ideal love "taste the bitterness of desire most intensely" (93). For Harold Bloom, Emma represents "something stubborn in all of us" (2) when yearning to erase the (ironic) discrepancy between infinite desire and finite satisfaction, an unfillable void that lies at the very core of Romantic longing (*Sehnsucht*). It is for this Sisyphean struggle that Giles Mitchell considers Emma "a universal figure" (125) in the conclusion of his seminal article on Emma as a pathological narcissist. In this article, I would like to draw on the Kantian sublime and Lacanian *jouissance* to illuminate the nature of Romantic longing and elucidate the ways in which Flaubert in the novel makes such longing visible in Emma, most visionary of all, and Charles, most earthbound of all, to evince that the pain of irony indeed dominates life.

I

Let me begin by defining Romantic longing with the ending lines of a love poem, entitled "To—," that P. B. Shelley wrote in 1822 probably for Jane Williams, a woman with whom he was infatuated with near the end of his life:

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow? (639, Stanza 2)

By the last four lines, Shelley articulated a fundamental rupture at the core of our being between the moth and the star, the finite and the infinite, a rupture that could lead to an (eternal) longing for a joy unsullied by the mundanity of life, by "the sphere of our sorrow." The "desire of the moth for the star" can be found in most of us at different stages of life, manifesting itself, particularly, in our dissatisfaction with material reality. The desire is inevitable yet potentially harmful or even lethal when, like a moth drawn to a flame, we are driven to go beyond the limits of material reality with an everlasting hope for something more, something beyond the boundaries of human surroundings, thus becoming painfully and perpetually discontent with the real circumstance amidst which *human* love must permanently reside.

Shelley's poem, as it were, serves to illustrate the Romantic longing (*Sehnsucht*) for the harmony of physical and spiritual faculties that, according to A. W. Schlegel, is given by nature to the ancient Greeks and yet becomes unattainable with the advent of Christianity, a religion that makes us distinctly aware "that no external object can ever entirely fill our souls; and that all earthly enjoyment is but a fleeting and momentary illusion" (26).² As such, while Greek art (including literature) is an art of enjoyment of the present, modern, or Romantic, art is that "of desire," hovering "betwixt recollection and hope" (27). Romantic longing betokens the pain of the inherently divided subject who can never be fully satisfied and therefore desires something more that nevertheless always recedes in such a way as to leave one with an aching sense of lack. Romantic longing, one can say, explains why "[i]rony for the Romantics was the only true mode of life" (Colebrook, 51).

In Kantian terms, Romantic longing is the pain of the sublime, arising from the impossibility of suturing the fissure between the human and the inhuman, phenomena and noumena, the sensible

faculty of imagination and the supersensible faculty of reason. For example, we can conceive of the absolutely great, but it always appears to be painfully inadequate to present an object in the empirical world to match the Idea of absolute greatness because compared with absolute greatness, everything else is small (Kant §23, 98; §26, 111; §27, 115). Meanwhile, such inadequacy opens up noumena to human desire when presenting it as a category within the bounds of the sensuous-phenomenal world. As Deleuze writes of the Kantian sublime, “the abyss between the sensible world [phenomena] and the supersensible world [noumena] exists only in order to be filled” (39) and “[i]n many ways [the faculties of] understanding and reason are deeply tormented by the ambition to make things in themselves known to us” (24). Considered in this light, the sublime points to the pain of pursuing a transcendent surplus, a surplus that always evades the grasp of human sensory, finite experience.

Psychoanalytically speaking, the sublime points to the pain of filling an immanent lack, a lack that acts as a black hole around which human desire is structured. Taking a cue from Kant, Lacan links the Kantian Thing-in-itself to the Freudian Thing. Although deprived of any real substance and inaccessible to symbolic reality, the Thing is the guiding pole of our longing for fulfilment beyond the satisfaction of physical needs. Indeed, the Thing is “the *cause* of the most fundamental human passion” (1992, 97) in that it functions to seduce the subject to the phantasmatic *jouissance* of future wholeness, fulfilment, and well-being (Fink 60). Since the Thing is not accessible to symbolic reality, of which the subject is part, one cannot access *jouissance* without the pain of desubjectification, without the *passage à l’acte* (Lacan 2014, 115). In Lacan, the pleasure principle is the law that keeps the subject more or less distant from the Thing, making the subject circle around it, cling to it in fantasy, without ever attaining it (Fink 96). Consequently, as subjects, we could be plagued by anxiety that our pleasure is never quite enough, by the desire to go “beyond the pleasure principle” of symbolic reality to reach the absolute pleasure of the Thing.

According to the psychiatrist Lewis Kirshner, in order for romantic love to proceed in symbolic reality, the subject has to succumb to the limits of the pleasure principle by respecting the boundary between reality and fantasy, pleasure and absolute pleasure, the I and the Not-I:

[W]hile the attraction of a beloved may be taken as real by the lover, as if that person alone can fulfil the lover’s desire, there is a symbolic boundary of permissible objects and behaviors, defined by rules, customs, narrative models, and the like, that may not be crossed. Central to these limits is the recognition of the otherness of the object, the beloved person’s absolute separateness. (87)

That is, the lover must accept that an unbridgeable inter-subjective gap exists between him/her and his/her beloved—however madly in love they are with each other. Nevertheless, endowed with “all the virile qualities” (Baudelaire, “*Madame Bovary*,” 653), Emma refuses to acknowledge the insurmountable gap and insists on the realisation of a total union, absolute pleasure which is impossible to fulfil within the bounds of symbolic reality. It is for this reason that Baudelaire regards Emma as a very sublime example of her kind (654). Emma, to quote Hulme in a different context, “is always flying, flying over abysses, flying up into the eternal gases” (62–63).

Her indomitable will, as we shall see, illustrates that of a Byronic figure “who cannot put up with the existing world . . . because he has ideals which presuppose the necessity for perpetual fervent movement forward, movement which is constantly confined by the stupidity and the unimaginativeness and the flatness of the existing world” (Berlin 154). Isaiah Berlin describes this discontent as “the Byronic syndrome,” one that lies at the heart of the European Romanticism (154–55).

II

Critics often ascribe Emma’s Romantic longing for absolute pleasure, *jouissance*, to her early life in the convent, succeeded by dreamy visions of happiness derived from the sentimental Romantic novels she reads. Grande, for instance, maintains that one cannot sufficiently understand Emma’s unhappiness without examining her early education in the convent and later role models in Roman-

tic novels (79). The two encounters indeed sow the seeds of her longing. It is, however, during her visit to La Vaubyessard that she first encounters the materialisation of dreamy happiness and thereby kindles her resolution to fulfil the lack at the core of her marriage. As “an inward detachment” (Flaubert 2004, 38) of Emma from Charles looms large, they are invited to the party in the chateau at La Vaubyessard of the Marquis d’Andervilliers, a former patient of Charles. There the pompous building, exotic food, the waltz, and stylish and flirtatious ladies and gentlemen all combine, as Lacan would say, to create an ideal mirror image that Emma desires to “be part of” (Flaubert 2004, 49) and (mis)recognises as the embodiment of “bliss, passion, and ecstasy, words that she had found so beautiful in books” (32).

In a scenario that recalls Lacan’s notion of “the mirror stage,” Emma for the first time experiences a “drama” in which a “primordial Discord” (Lacan 1977, 4) occurs between the “perfect,” splendid life in La Vaubyessard and her imperfect, lacklustre life in the farm where she grew up. When looking at the broken window panes against which peasants in the garden press their faces,

[s]uddenly she thought of Les Bertaux. She saw the farm, the muddy pond, her father in his smock under the apple trees, and she saw herself in earlier days, skimming cream with her finger from the earthenware milk pans in the dairy. But, in the dazzling splendours of the present moment, her past life, always until then so vivid, was vanishing completely, and she almost doubted that she had ever lived it. (Flaubert 2004, 47)

Outside the window panes is Emma’s past life, and inside is the fantasy life that she misidentifies as the real life: rather, she (mis)recognises the party as the very incarnation of her desire for a love life full of starry splendour beyond the exigencies of social reality. From this point onwards, Emma has a definite goal to mend the broken window to stop her past life intruding on her dreamy happiness for fear of sliding back again into the dull emptiness where she started.

Flaubert concludes Chapter Eight of Part I by saying that “her [Emma’s] visit to La Vaubyessard had left a chasm [*un trou*] in her life, like those great crevasses that a storm sometimes hollows out in the mountains, in a single night” (2004, 51; 1972, 90). This gracefully written sentence very well encapsulates the story. For one thing, the simile foreshadows the violent, irresistible impact that the ideal image of the party produces on Emma: as the story unfolds, the impact turns out to be destructive like a storm and culminates in her suicide, a violent *passage à l’acte*, towards the end of the novel. For another, the violent *passage* cannot be separated from the phrase “a chasm in her life,” a metaphor which would serve better as the subtitle of the novel than *Mœurs de province* (Provincial Manners): Emma persistently desires to fill out—but to no avail—the hole (*trou*) at the core of her being in order to obtain complete satisfaction, absolute pleasure.

Emma’s obsession with *jouissance* takes the form of absolute love, love that, as Kirshner has put it, effaces the gap between one’s private feelings and the reality of the other. In her *liaison* either with Rodolphe or with Léon, Emma longs to erase the gap, to reach the absolute pleasure of the Thing; she ignores the other’s absolute separateness, and creates a fantasy to drag the other into her impossible ideal world to possess him completely. For instance, in motivating Rodolphe to elope with her, Emma states,

What harm could possibly befall me? There isn’t a desert or a precipice or an ocean that I wouldn’t cross with you. When we’re living together, every passing day will be like an embrace uniting us more closely, more completely! There’ll be nothing to disturb us, no cares, no obstacles. We’ll be alone, just you and me, forever! (177).

Emma builds a *vita nuova* on an ideal world so paradisiacal as to move even a womaniser like Rodolphe. Reason, though, soon seizes him inasmuch as he knows very well that the blissful union Emma pictures will not be based on mutual possession but on her absolute possession of him, on her annihilation of his subjectivity. It comes as no surprise, then, that Rodolphe decides to run away from Emma. His departure, though, may not strike readers too much as an irony of life since he is never serious about love, as Flaubert subtly satirises Rodolphe’s false display of love by introducing the

presentation of agricultural prizes to crisscross, or indeed gloss, his seduction speech. For instance, the gold medal in *Manures* is awarded while Rodolphe speaks pretentiously to Emma “Time and again I’ve intended to leave, yet I’ve followed you, I’ve remained by your side” (132).

Léon’s case, however, is different from Rodolphe’s. Léon embodies the idea of the young Romantic—sensitive, sentimental, and imaginative—and therefore seems an excellent match for Emma. They fall for each other when they first meet—an instant *rappor*t that is not the case with her liaison with Rodolphe. Consequently, when Léon can no longer endure his secret love for Emma and thus decides to leave Yonville for Paris, the stormy feeling of having a hole in her heart returns to plunge Emma into the depth of despair. Three years later, when they meet again, they do not wait but soon fall in love madly with each other. For Léon, Emma epitomises the beauty of literature: “She was the beloved of every novel, the heroine of every drama, the vague *she* of every volume of poetry . . . , she was, above all else, an Angel” (235). But to be with angels, one has to live in a noumenal world, in a world beyond the bounds of social reality. Léon, of course, cannot (afford to) do so. Gradually, he is frightened by Emma’s immoderate propensity to disregard symbolic reality and, above all, his subjectivity:

[T]here seemed to Léon to be something excessive, shadowy, and ominous, something that kept slipping between them, subtly, to separate them. . . . What had charmed him at first now rather frightened him. Besides, he rebelled against the way, with each passing week, his personality was becoming increasingly dominated by hers. He resented Emma for this ongoing victory. He even struggled to stop himself loving her, . . . (251)

Eventually, Léon decides to cease his struggle by giving up Emma to build a better career, or indeed, to maintain his subjectivity. Much as he would like to jump or fly, Léon does not forget he is mixed up with earth and therefore has to return back. Compared to Rodolphe’s retreat, Léon’s would really push the reader to reflect deplorably on the triumphant reign of the reality principle and, accordingly, on the irony of the inter-subjective gap in love.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator says, “she [Emma] wasn’t happy, she’d never been happy! Why did life fall so far short of her expectations, why did whatever she depended on turn instantly to dust beneath her hand?” (252) Here it seems as if Flaubert spoke through the narrator that “Irony . . . seems to me to dominate life.” In her obstinate pursuit of complete satisfaction, Emma is doomed to be unhappy since she refuses to succumb to the ironic fact that, as Lacan would say, there is always a hole in one’s life that can never be filled up within the bounds of social reality. As such, throughout the novel, she constantly has the sense that there is something more she could have had, something she has missed out on. Emma, Baudelaire would say, “would always be content where [she is] not and never stop discussing the question of relocation with [her] soul” (“Anywhere Out of the World,” 303).

In Flaubert, as in Lacan, the tension between the limits of satisfaction and the longing for the infinite is a permanent, albeit ironic, feature of life. Indeed, instead of being “the only character in *Madame Bovary* who is content with life” as Grande describes it (84), Charles, albeit down-to-earth, feels the aching sense of lack and therefore longs for “greater freedom” (Flaubert 2004, 13) in his first marriage. More significantly, after Emma dies, Charles turns into an Emma-like person who desperately tries to sustain his Romantic posture as a testimony of Emma’s continuing presence:

[H]e conceived for her an unrelenting, raging desire that fed despair, and was unbounded, because it could never be satisfied now. To please her, as if she were still alive, he adopted her preferences and her ideas; he bought himself patent-leather boots and began wearing white cravats. He waxed his moustaches, and, like her, signed his name to promissory notes. (305)

Ironically, if Emma were still alive, she would have fallen for this “Romantic” Charles—whom she used to despise as “a pitiful creature” (56) when alive. But, alas, “Fate is to blame” (311), as Charles utters despairingly at the novel’s end. Eventually, “overwhelmed by the nebulous wafts of love that

swell[s] his sorrowing heart" (311), Charles dies of bereavement while holding in his hand a lock of Emma's long black hair; he wipes out his subjectivity to gratify his longing for a total union with Emma in the grave—the *passage à l'acte*—and thereby achieves *jouissance*.

Compared to Emma's dramatic suicide, a violent *passage à l'acte*, in a crowded bedroom, Charles's lonely death in a garden is demurely placid but no less ironically poignant. Through the most Romantic character Emma's liaisons and, to a lesser degree, the most Realist character Charles's marriages, Flaubert shows that the pain of (cosmic) irony indeed prevails in life. "[W]herever one does not restrict oneself," as Friedrich Schlegel writes of Romantic irony, "one is restricted by the world" (147).

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Notes

- ¹ Colebrook defines cosmic irony as follows: "Where the expectations of a character or community are thwarted by life's events, events which often seem to pass judgement on life or that seem to be the outcome of fate" (175).
- ² Schlegel predicated his idea of Romantic longing on the distinction Friedrich Schiller established between "naïve" and "sentimental" poetry according to the harmony with nature. The former belongs to a people or poet whose consciousness *dwells* in nature so *naturally* that sense and reason have not been divided. By contrast, the latter belongs to a people or poet whose social life has been culturally mediated so much as to leave nature behind; as such, the harmonious cooperation of sense and reason becomes merely "an idea" from which the actual world is infinitely separated (201).

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A Deleuzian Encounter: The Descent of Süskind's "Das Parfum"

SPENCER SHAW

1. Smell and the Enlightenment

The smell and taste of things remain poised a long time. Like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest: and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence...¹

Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is born into abject poverty in mud amidst the stench of dead fish. Growing up in 18th century Paris he displays uncanny abilities to differentiate and classify every known smell, even though he has no personal body odour. He becomes a serial killer, and in the process of robbing and killing forges an identity from being vapid and nondescript to chameleon-like, with an ability to adopt a wide variety of social roles and skills. His impoverished birth is prelude to a journey which adopts Deleuzian themes, including difference and the life-drive:

The cry that followed his birth, the cry with which he had brought himself to people's attention and his mother to the gallows, was not an instinctive cry for sympathy and love. The cry...was the newborn's decision against love and nevertheless for life.²

As an ambivalent figure, Grenouille wanders between nature and civilization, freedom and capture, expression of desire and its repression. Not a complete individual but not quite of the earth, Grenouille is a token locked in the nether world. Smell is not an incidental sense perception but crucial to this dual sense of existence, standing at the crossroads between dependence on the rational, and lines of flight into the irrational. Perpetually in the flow of a shifting, elusive identity the work allows us, the reader, to explore Deleuze's advocacy to pursue difference through art.

Grenouille is the barely formed creature emanating from earth, relating directly to the excesses of squalor and privilege in society. At first, he germinates from vegetative state remaining inconspicuous until by building the ability to create perfume as a work of art, he grows in personal stature: 'Ultimately, Grenouille's crimes are the transgressive acts of an artist and a sort of unwitting natural philosopher attempting to forge a subjectivity.'³ As a force of nature, bent on survival above all else, this odourless being replaces his own inhuman lack of odour by creating an artificial replacement, extracting a scented surrogate from his virginal, murdered victims in an attempt to capture the essence of beauty.

The sense of smell is the work's dominating motif, socially, culturally, and philosophically. Smells waft through life, diversely attached to organisms, nature and materials, Grenouille even determines to capture the smell of inanimate objects: 'If he had ten thousand doorknobs and wrapped them in tallow...he could produce a tiny drop of brass-doorknob essence...He likewise succeeded with the porous chalky dust from a stone...'⁴ Smell distinguishes itself as a primitive sensation claiming pride of place as the longing for immediate union with surrounding nature; to all intents the inescapable life-force that lingers and envelops:

For people could close their eyes to greatness, to horrors, to beauty, and their ears to melodies or deceiving worlds. But they could not escape scent. For scent was the brother of breath. Together with breath it entered human beings, who could not defend themselves against it, not if they wanted to live.⁵

Deleuze's critique of autonomous subjectivity contra the movement of desire swirls around the play of bodily destruction and preservation, correlated with Grenouille who destroys to create. His efforts are a token acknowledgment to the life-force, searching for essences to fend off the threat of dissolution. Smell is the force which supports the artistic use of percepts and affects, demarcating differentiation as it does so. Such awareness is especially part of art creation, a compound of sensation forever captured in a work, a reminder of Süskind's creative writing facility and Grenouille's own artistic endeavour. When Grenouille perceives wood the affect is the independence of 'woodiness' which recognises diversity; maple-wood, oak, pine, elm, pear, old, young, rotting, mossy, recognisable in trees, logs, chips, and splinters:⁶

Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves...the work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else exists: it exists in itself.⁷

Distinct movements parallel structures which are not causal but coordinated. Grenouille's acts of collection, bottling human essences, are a violent destruction of souls scientifically processed to create new figures of desire. It is derelict to solely consider perfume in the abstract as a desirable balm with levels of refinement and sophistication built into its production. Instead, with a deeper contextual approach perfume is described as part of daily interaction in 18th century France. It serves as a means of survival to compensate for unbearable sanitary conditions, allowing those who can afford to combat the odoriferous onslaught considerable advantage over the working class who can barely pay their living costs. Indeed, smell as desire creates the multitude of affects all the characters experience, from Madame Gaillard who takes charge of Grenouille as a boy to the consul Antoine Richis, whose daughter he finally murders to complete his perfumed formula. As we experience his roller coaster change of fortune, the overall affect is one of both repulsion and attraction, active forces which clash throughout the text to reassemble perspectives founded in the social collective.

The social collective is the Age of Reason, 18th century France. For Deleuze, important art is political, and revolutionary in its critique. Connected to the social milieu, art has a privileged position, a semiotic force to capture the style of matter and real movement in its images of thought. In 'Das Parfum' affective sensations weave a pattern of interrelated images of perfume, squalor, beauty, man, beast, life, murder, science and becoming. Deleuze integrates,

a political dimension into the arts and thought...Art is no longer a matter of signification, but of function...The artist, like a doctor of civilization, is conferred a political role where the effect of art is determined within its two social dimensions, social production and revolutionary agency.⁸

As a work of art in process, perfume achieves much more than a trivial balm to hide putrefaction. Grenouille's sole escape from his insufferable life relies on perfume for his salvation, yet throughout his episodic journey his creations are related to the burgeoning capitalism of the time. They are the expression of a dawning era in which the role of art is deposed from its honorific throne in the name of commodification and profit, a move which encourages Deleuze to argue for the importance of experimental, anti-canonical, 'minor' literature.⁹

Grenouille's society is determined to camouflage what is disturbing and unacceptable. The idea of progress and elevation of humanism are meant to eradicate causes for anxiety and menace, circumventing the counter-reality of disease and contamination. But the dark side of the enlightenment comes to the fore explicating the innocence of perfume with the codes of a controlling society. For Deleuze, the empire of reason is a false escape from tutelage and, for Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, positivism and the scientific quest lack a meaningful moral compass and the need for mystery, 'the scientific object is petrified, whereas the rigid ritual of former times appears supple in its substitution of one thing for another. The world of magic still retained differences whose traces have vanished even in linguistic forms.'¹⁰

The discourse of perfume allows currents of romanticism and enlightenment to surface at different points in the text. Events are partly a reaction to the disorder, dirt and rampant disease of French cities, the cover-up of perfume and artifice. The possibility of disorder threatens profitable commerce of nascent capitalism and industrialisation while at the same time such disorder is absorbed by the system as a sign of its further growth and infallibility. Capitalism comes under Deleuze's scrutiny, criticised as a mechanism of endless flows which has no outside attainable limits. His preoccupation with creativity is frustrated by an economic, capitalist commitment to timely profit and surplus value:

If capitalism is the exterior limit of all societies, this is because capitalism for its part has no exterior limit, but only an interior limit that is capital itself and that it does not encounter, but reproduces by always displacing it... In general, the introductions of innovations always tends to be delayed beyond the time scientifically necessary, until the moment when the market forecasts justify their exploitation on a large scale.¹¹

The objection is to cow-tail to prevailing discourse and bland acceptance of capitalist norms. The unit of capital is the one overriding template for evaluating society's health. In 'Das Parfum' emotions, notions of happiness, hopes, and relationships are filtered through perfume as feelings which can be artificially engendered in the same way as commercial products off a consumer belt. In his critique of bourgeois political economy and utilitarian philosophy, Deleuze pursues a similar trajectory of thought to George Bataille with arguments drawn from excess energy-flow and Bataille's anti-philosophy of eroticism, 'to dismantle the concept of a fixed and unitary self with the dynamic notions of becoming and jouissance.'¹²

Bataille's excrement-philosophy is brought out sharply in the Paris of pre-revolutionary times, with Süskind's scatological descriptions of filth and squalor depicting a city where life and death vie for street space. Bataille uses his surrealist affiliation to support imagery of rotting matter, dismemberment, putrefaction and violence.¹³ Süskind's concern, like Bataille, is to avoid the passive synthesis of reason and idealism in favour of contradiction, uncanny ambivalence, and the juxtaposition of the abject with poetic, 'explosive affective ambivalence – intensified through a range of encounters that underscored the connections between violence, death, and excess...'¹⁴ These observations correspond to Grenouille's journey through violence and identity fragmentation, exploring the limits of human experience through 'ecstasy' and 'the loss of self'.¹⁵ The impossible quest in search for the essence of beauty foregrounds connected differences, or heterology between beauty and ugliness, the alluring and disgusting: 'The heterogeneous category includes not only the sacred elements, whether social or asocial, but also the arousing elements of erotic life, and generally speaking all objects of disgust.'¹⁶

Grenouille finds that living with the dead, surrounded by his flacons, is an open portal to free-flowing desire. At first there is joy before the fall. Grenouille's self-inflicted invitation to die by his own action envisions both Deleuze's and Bataille's joy before death; a joy that has no other object than immediate life, which rejects transcendence and immutable order, 'one can only laugh at a sacred drunkenness allied with a horror of debauchery... Only a shameless, indecent saintliness can lead to a sufficiently happy, loss of self. Joy before death means that life can be glorified from root to summit.'¹⁷ However, when Grenouille finally fades, without will or drive to return to his body, a dark pulse awakens through the congregation. The culmination of cannibalism has naturalistic tones: 'All the products of the body and the body after life are a waste: the dead and new born are our excrement, and it is as such that the desire to eat them has subsisted across the civilized world.'¹⁸

Living for beauty is only attainable because of the completed artwork that is the final elixir for life transitioning to death. The object of desire is contained within perfume but circumscribed by the impossibility of genuine possession; his artwork is resilient and defiant. Desire is all that Grenouille has, his disdain for the people and their society is manifest at the very same moment he releases the fragrant disguise and captivates the crowds, 'in that moment his whole disgust for humankind rose up again within him and completely soured his triumph, so that he felt not only no joy, but not even

the least bit satisfaction.¹⁹ Try as he will to intimate a sense of caring, he again becomes—animal, the tic, the frog, the predator, no longer restricted to the pursuit of love and beauty.

Grenouille discovers there is an acceptable way to behave, one which becomes his disguise if power is to be exercised. For Deleuze, questioning the rule of enlightenment reason takes us further to question the very centrality of subjectivity and the cogito, arguing that it is replaced by the pre-individual, transcendental field. Sensations received by all who experience the created mixture are not qualitative but vibratory, intensive reality, gradients and vectors, what Deleuze defines as ‘allogotropic variations’.²⁰ Perfume is not the restriction or momentary capture of the organism but rather the underlying pulsation of vitalism, a wave that penetratingly flows to encounter intense forces acting on those bodies which come to experience it. Dual tendencies remain, presenting a messy admixture of warmth and coldness, cruelty and compassion, indifference and sympathy, all dependent on diverse intensities:

When sensation is linked to the body...it ceases to be representative and becomes real; and *cruelty* will be linked less and less to the representation of something horrible, and will become nothing other than the action of forces upon the body, or sensation (the opposite of the sensational).²¹

As a force-field of consciousness, scent is liberated from matter, etherealized yet still related to materiality. This reality is one without which Grenouille has no being, he needs to relate to smell’s consciousness to find meaning in life, at best to merge with it. Grenouille ‘drank in the aroma, he drowned in it, impregnating himself through his innermost pores, *until he became wood himself*.’²² The world is perceivable only by smell, the pervasive consciousness of life which attaches its affectivity to food, brocades, threads, wood, sweating horses, bursting rose-buds, the stillness of misty nights. On this, Süskind and Deleuze are in alignment.

The dead women are immanently present to Grenouille. In comparable fashion to the signs which Proust explores, perfume is a true sign, not the simplistic facticity of a worldly sign, which it also is, but more profoundly, a true sign of affectivity and joyous exaltation. When the perfume master, Baldini, tests Grenouille’s creations he is not only reminded of an associated memory but feels his whole career is summated, his life goals realised, his marriage takes on added satisfaction, the world becomes rich and abundant. This is not merely sensuous origin but an exploration and development that resonates from past to present through all social and personal levels of experience. Likewise, Grenouille’s acts are not based on the repetition for love of his mother, who has quickly vanished from the scene, but upon the fragrance of his first victim in the rue de Marais, which was extensively psychological, organic and life-giving: ‘A hundred thousand odours seemed worthless in the presence of this scent. This one scent was the higher principle, the pattern by which the others must be ordered. It was pure beauty.’²³ Deleuze acutely explores sensations in his analysis of Proust.²⁴ The past sense of smell is more than ways to relate to past events, it transmits lines of apprenticeship and personal development, likewise Grenouille’s frequent recourse to resurrecting past smells denotes his future goal, growing skills in applying ingredients and techniques to hone the ability to create perfection.

Perfume emerges as floating consciousness which opens up insights and catalyses emergent events. This follows from Deleuze’s definition of consciousness which allows for nomadic exploration of agency as applied to the personal, the impersonal and the material. It allows for a force of consciousness which shifts within different systems and sites, at varying rates and speeds. Film consciousness communicates this most forcibly; a decentered consciousness that produces singularity, multiplicity and immanent difference: ‘The emergence of camera consciousness as an anonymous point of view is expressed independently of particularized subjectivities...there is no equivalent in natural perception.’²⁵

As floating cores of consciousness, smell is the perceiver of perception, a registering of the environment through all evocative sense. Perception and consciousness merge transcending subject-object dichotomy,

it is a case of going beyond the subjective and the objective towards a pure Form which sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content. We are no longer faced with subjective or objective images; we

are caught in a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness... a camera-consciousness which has become autonomous.²⁶

The affects and images smell creates are neither subordinate nor superordinate to what is the focus of attention but in aggregate point to an acentred consciousness which constitutes Grenouille's peculiar mindset. Grenouille's panoramic insight which scours the environment is more than human, symptomatic of his other-worldly supremacy, 'he smelled it more precisely than many people could see it, for his perception was perception after the fact and thus of a higher order.'²⁷

2. The Uncanny

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?²⁸

The uncanny has a particular affinity with Freud's analysis of the unconscious, surrealism in art, and 'Das Parfum's depiction of a serial killer: 'Like the major Bretonian categories that issued from it (the marvellous, compulsive beauty, objective chance), surrealist automatism speaks of psychic mechanisms of compulsive repetition and death drive – speaks of them in the register of the uncanny.'²⁹ Perfume's journey takes a path through the death wish, a return to the barely relinquished primordial state back to the inorganic. There is clear destructive impetus where the social order contains elements to be controlled, mastered or destroyed. Pleasure begins with libidinal gratification linked to destruction, a compulsion to repeat through acts of murder: 'Since the death drive is tinged with eroticism, pleasure may be felt in destruction and desire aroused by death', a combination of the sexual and destructive 'intimated by the surrealists'.³⁰

The intensity employed to achieve perfect beauty is the beyond of life, disjunctive adjacency to actual life, an acceptance of nihilism which leads into self-imploding vertigo, suspended in dystopian despair under the fascist banner of 'any means justifies the end'. Deleuze refers to vertigo as disorientation³¹ as the purity of affect which intensifies desire: 'Pharmacodynamic experiences or physical experiences such as vertigo ... reveal to us... that difference in itself, that depth in itself or that intensity in itself, at the original moment at which it is neither qualified nor extended.'³² The pharmacodynamic effect of 'Das Parfum' creates an extended body from the decomposition of multiple bodies – essentially a fusing of levels between the living and dead: 'In taking a drug, my body encounters another real, effective body. Therefore, it is not a matter of consciousness being 'altered' by a secondary attribute; rather, it is a relation between two bodies that undergoes an essential transformation that takes place below the level of consciousness.'³³

Deleuze recognises surrealist motifs and uncanny experience of vertigo, dizziness and disembodiment may result in an increased ability to perceive the imperceptible, 'a perception of things, thoughts, desires in which desire, thought, and the thing have invaded all of perception: the imperceptible finally perceived.'³⁴ Süskind describes extraordinary perception as a reaction to Grenouille's drug: 'It was like a fit of weeping you cannot fight down, like tears that have been held back too long... nothing was left but an amorphous fluid, and all they could feel was their hearts floating and sloshing about... they perceived only his counterfeit aura...'³⁵

In 'Das Parfum' the uncanny, which renders everyday objects surprisingly strange, portrays Grenouille as the *uncanny* guest who leaves and would never return.³⁶ Grenouille's disturbing influence never ceases to leave its destructive mark. We note that death is not limited to the serial killer's actions but uncannily accompanies Grenouille wherever he places himself; his mother is executed soon after she gives birth, Madame Grimal, who looks after him as an infant, reaches old age but 'was dead in her heart since childhood',³⁷ Baldini, the master perfumer, falls asleep to awake no more when his house mysteriously collapses into the river, while the Marquis de la Taillarde-Espinasse, after supporting Grenouille, decides to climb the highest mountain in the Pyrenees and is never heard from again.

Apart from images of the monstrous, the unspeakable, and ambiguous, Deleuze also places uncanny power on a more mundane plateau, the defamiliarisation of the everyday in pursuit of

creativity. Viktor Shklovskij's original discussion on art and textuality considers artfulness to be effective when employing defamiliarising techniques to establish difference. This is where objects are shifted out of their typical associations and experienced for the first time as if new born. Aesthetic perception is considered more real than the real, more effectively bringing out the 'full and live presence of its object than real perception.'³⁸ Süskind's work illumines dislocation with endless permutations of herbs, spices and flora which escape the order of signification to uniquely realise the many facets of human passion. The uncanny creates fissures in the familiar and catalyses multi-dimensional possibilities for Grenouille's experimentation. The creative activity of 'making strange' is literally to foreground hitherto unnoticed and automatic reactions to make them focal points of attention.

Deleuze would look to apply inventive, artistic perspectives to disturb the power of regimes from superimposing their codes of conduct on freedom of expression. Defamiliarisation disturbs and is disturbing; it increases sensitivity and emotion, problematizes the taken-for-granted and thereby subverts ideological and bureaucratic structuring of social life. Every important work of art is political, in minor literature everything takes on a collective value: 'The political domain has contaminated every statement...literature finds itself positively charged with the role, and function of collective and even revolutionary, enunciation...'³⁹

Enlightenment self-assurance and pursuit of self-determination are ripe pickings for defamiliarizing techniques to reveal an underbelly of limitation and bourgeois calculation which inhibits imagination and passion. In 'Das Parfum' smell begins as bourgeois contagion and by dint of uncanny experimentation finds an alluring palliative. This reveals another affective dimension catalysed by perfume; unbound sensations which initiate and disseminate extreme actions of seduction, ecstasy and violence as a force which produces the otherwise of thought.

Deleuze is always concerned with the hidden. He emphasises the positive side of the uncanny as it intensifies acts of deterritorialisation which are key to the creativity needed to think otherwise and disrupt the world of cliché. 'Das Parfum', however, complicates the matter by paradoxically hiding what it reveals because its source lies with the transformation of material substance, the intangible which creates an aura of impossible consummation by befuddling exposed senses into a trance-like daydream. In order to grasp this, Deleuze reminds us that the force of intensity, our very life-force, is imperceptible, revealed in times of instability, at those sublime, uncanny moments where limits have to be exceeded and the clutches of homogenised systems overcome:

Intensity ...is that which can only be sensed...because it gives to be sensed, thereby awakening memory and forcing thought. The point of *sensory distortion* is often to grasp intensity independently of extensity or prior to the qualities in which it is developed.⁴⁰

It is this raw, tumultuous energy which flows through enchanted scent to culminate in an unbridled orgy of lust and cannibalism, a sign there is eventual need for limit and re-territorialisation to humanly cope. Indeed, the uncanny, as the familiar suddenly made strange, is used as an example throughout Deleuze's work, 'Deleuze's privileged examples of the birth of thought can all be characterised as in some sense uncanny...It might be said that, for Deleuze, the uncanny is in some sense the *paradigm* of that from which we learn, at all.'⁴¹

Grenouille's acts transgress the boundaries between the human and non-human, suffusing the natural body odour of sweat with the artificially created mixture of fragrance. Smell is the insistent marker of emotions and events in what becomes Grenouille's castle of the mind which houses his innermost double who excavates his life's journey. In his mental castle he keeps an olfactory diary which is regularly surveyed during his self-imposed, seven year exile in the cave at Auvergne. For Freud, the root for doubling manifests in early stages of ego development when it has not yet differentiated itself from its environment, a state which Grenouille is only too familiar with as primeval entity of the earth. Grenouille's efforts to create a double from his condition may originally have been a way to insure against the destruction of his frail ego but soon becomes the 'uncanny harbinger of death.'⁴²

As the scented double of his crude, repulsive, original self, Grenouille's identity forks within perfume, at one time direct elixir, profoundly moving those in contact, at other times an effective camouflage of authentic conditions, adept at covertly creating a smoke screen of acceptance. Emerging from a recluse and looking awful, his metamorphosis intensifies, appearing to be a mixture of man and beast, 'some kind of forest creature.'⁴³ The double emerges as both mass murderer and messianic saviour, the role of destroyer as well as creator of worlds to be controlled,

this was his Empire! The incomparable Empire of Grenouille, created and ruled over by him', Grenouille the Great becomes the complete megalomaniac, a split identity, 'he stared vacantly...sank into a numbed sleep. At the same time *the other Grenouille* fell asleep on his horse blanket. And his sleep was just as fathomless as that of the *innermost* Grenouille...'.⁴⁴

For Deleuze, doubling exerts a powerful influence in art, in crystalline images which alternate between light and dark, hidden virtuality, visible actuality, limpid exposure and opaque darkness. This is an indiscernible coupling of immense power, never insuring which side will surface, or at which moments the monstrous will be released.⁴⁵ Grenouille is a counter-being, a figure betwixt and between virtuality and actualised facticity. This is the circuitry of virtual images which alternate and actualise at different moments, reinforcing the objective status of the double, indiscernibly caught between past and present, light and darkness, fantasy and reality. While Grenouille vacillates between limpid and opaque, perfume is a charge of energy, asserting itself as powerful, spiritualized essence which dictates the style of the work. Süskind explores myriad forms of natural herbs and spices to produce this unprecedented creation of distilled essence. As its force flits from one transformative ingredient to another, it changes the life of recipients, an essence which also individualizes: 'Essence is not only particular, not only individual, but is individualizing. Essence individualizes and determines the substance in which it is incarnated...essence is in itself difference.'⁴⁶

By creating an aura previously lacking, perfume allows Grenouille to traverse the gap between marginalised outsider, with no social position, to being an influential, even desirable figure of note. As a doubled, ambiguous figure, Grenouille is at one moment an abominable criminal who should die in the most cruel way imaginable on the scaffold and, at another, 'innocence personified', a 'little, innocent man'⁴⁷ who finally becomes an object of adoration and love. With its uncanny moments of contrasts, 'Das Parfum' still manages to bring together opposing series, a function of Deleuze's dark precursor. The dark precursor is mediator between different series, serving as a bridge or passage between disparate spheres which bring about emergence, even as it negates itself. The nature of perfume is liquidity and flow, a force which effectuates material change, interaction between invisible flux and material expression. Rather than Grenouille instigating change between perfume's effects and his actions, many extraneous natural, cultural and social forces are at work to make his artwork possible, in spite of his monstrous actions. Deleuze describes the dark precursor as a disguised force of communication, a mediator between diverse series. In 'Das Parfum' there is constant reverberation between the series of love and beauty and the series of lethal power: 'These series are liable to resonate under the influence of...a dark precursor which stands for this totality in which all the levels co-exist: each series is repeated in the other...'.⁴⁸

3. Assemblages and Becoming-other

Grenouille mitigates his social disadvantages by creating a series of disparate planes which correspond to Deleuze's assemblages. As these planes become actualised, so they release transforming identities which break down constructed boundaries in gender, subject-object correlation, self and other. For Deleuze, material systems reach thresholds that restrict movement, constricting the flow of desiring-production and call for the 'schizo' mindset which seeks to open creative, dynamic systems. The importance of perfume as a major signifier in society and all connected lifestyles of class and gender comprise one such assemblage.

Grenouille is a confluence of many influences and processes, a cluster of forces manifesting in his environment as part of social nexus. As a rhizomatic figure, defined by Deleuze as someone or something which assumes different connecting forms and chains of multiplicity,⁴⁹ we can follow the exploration of forces of individuation as they are expressed through the flow of desire. Grenouille's immersion in his scented artwork goes beyond being human to the point of 'creating zones of indetermination which become the launching pads for inhuman becomings.'⁵⁰ His utilisation of perfume traces the metamorphosis of identity, a fragrant avatar of compulsive desire. In masterly fashion, Süskind explicates assemblage to show that it is only through the olfactory experience that Grenouille recognises the notion of the beloved, a 'soul' conveying a possible world previously unknown, a world approachable through smells which Grenouille strives to decipher. It also points the nature of this particular assemblage and demands an understanding of the extent to which perfume remains perfume. Its various 'treatments' beg the question of whether it remains a pleasant, simple smell to one's body or reaches its limit point by becoming a poison, psychotic drug, or weaponized philtre.

A series of assemblages constitute his journey. Before any assemblage functions the properties of perfume must be in place and much of the work shows diverse ingredients as an assemblage of the creative process. Constituted properties become immanent to different assemblages, concerned with images of fashion, or appropriate differences of class. Grenouille's particular assemblage is the use of perfume to solidify his identity, increase self-belief, mask his real presence and partake in the Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse's experiment to showcase his theories of the danger from earthly gas, what he calls, 'fluidum letale'.⁵¹

'Das Parfum' depicts a quirky assemblage, a conflation of scientifically collected fragrance together with the diverse aura of tragic identities with their own life-stories and emotions in place. The spectrums within assemblage are noteworthy in that they are not to be considered as dialectic oppositions between forces, events and action. Deleuze's makes this point forcefully in differentiating masochism from sadism, refusing to consider them as connected poles of the same spectrum.⁵² Instead, components and actants of the perfume assemblage are diverse juxtapositions, each with their own character and image-thoughts which lead protagonists, such as Baldini and Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse on to joyful experiences. What is important to realise is that in all manner of assemblages, especially the aesthetic, in-between silences and discontinuities proliferate through their interactive associations, disparities and disjunctions. In particular, incorporated within perfume is the not-yet-actualised residue (what might exert a field of influence on others) with the once-having-been (protean, sweet-smelling, scent of innocence).

In this respect, Süskind comprehensively probes the discourse of perfume. Collecting a wide array of fragrances to comprise fresh aromatic combinations, the discourse includes flowers and spices, woods and hops, 'floral oils, tinctures, extracts, secretions, balms resins and other drugs in dry, liquid or waxy form-through diverse pomades, pastes, powders, soaps, creams sachets, bandolines, brilliantines...and countless genuine perfumes.'⁵³ Activities within this assemblage comprise social and commercial institutions, owners of perfumeries, mixers, assistants, all of whom through their active knowledge exert varying degrees of power and influence with their specialised prowess.

The intricate relations comprising the perfume industry, its marketing and consumption, methods of classification, and various categories of spices and herbs, perpetuate the dissemination of knowledge and with it power struggles and domination. This extended reach encompasses a whole world of scents which flows through the assemblage; a world of flux reflected in changing living conditions from pauper to respected businessman, from non-entity to respected innovator, from asexual to sexual predator. Assemblages territorialize connections but are never closed, always retaining a constantly fluctuating complexion, from Baldini's business 'the richest citizen in Paris and Europe's great perfumer'⁵⁴ to Grenouille the nomad, an outsider to himself, bereft even of self-knowledge, itinerant journeyman who assimilates assemblage affects of fauna, countryside, disgust-

ing smell of horsemen, threat of humanity, the steamy, putrid sweat of those he is forced to live with, the intoxicating honey-sweet scent of his victims.

Deleuze explains this wide-ranging process of unpacking capability derived from the body-without-organs as the driving force of assemblage, to learn how the body functions and reacts, just as Grenouille tests himself throughout the narrative by showing how affects impact each other, body and thoughts destroying or enhancing, whatever the circumstance brings forth. Grenouille is not the initiator of forces instigated by perfume but a collector and composer of forces which have been put in motion at his disposal. These relate to the matter that becomes the connections of perfume's strata, as prelude to deterritorialisation:

It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight...*descend* from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held: gently tip the assemblage... It is only there that the body-without-organs reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.⁵⁵

Perfume stakes its territory, it allows for an examination of structure and organization which holds the assemblage together but within the context of change, contingency and uncertainty. The lengthy listing of ingredients and techniques for creating a multitude of fragrances is a tour de force feeding off myriad affordances in society, the role of war 'where a million have died' and class attitudes 'the bourgeoisie', all of which descriptively and analytically reflect the unpredictable metamorphoses that comprise the entity we know as Grenouille. Above all, Süskind describes how the perfume assemblage functions, how it works its techniques and ingredients to create a world of light and dark, material and abstract, beautiful and ugly, in sum, different forms of thinking the event.⁵⁶

The human body is an assemblage of powers and related interconnections, but in terms of becoming rather than being it is not a fixed, unchanging entity but open to life's desire. At various points Süskind seems to draw directly from Deleuze.⁵⁷ His describes the tick as it relates to the assemblage with the ability to be flexible and versatile; Grenouille *is* the tick in the tree,

life has nothing better to offer than perpetual isolation... The lonely tick which, wrapped up in itself, huddles in its tree, blind, deaf and dumb, and simply sniffs, sniffs all year long, for miles around for the blood of some passing animal... and waits... for the most improbable of chances that will bring blood, in animal form, directly beneath its tree. And only then does it abandon caution and drop and scratch and bore and bite into that alien flesh. The young Grenouille *was such a tick*.⁵⁸

Similarly, for Deleuze the tick is an opportunist, one who is,

attracted by light, hoists itself up to the tip of a branch; it is sensitive to the *smell* of mammals, and lets itself fall when one passes beneath the branches; it digs into its skin, at the least hairy place it can find... the rest of the time the tick sleeps, sometimes for years on end, indifferent to all that goes on in the immense forest.⁵⁹

Grenouille becomes the tick, becomes-animal and ultimately, perversely, becomes-woman. In following through Deleuze's exploration of becoming-animal we recognise a liberating exercise in creativity, for Grenouille an understandable escape from the insufferable pain of being human, subverted to social norms which constantly alienate him. Similar to Kafka's description of lines of escape from the inhumanity of diabolical power, 'there is the answer of a becoming-animal: to become a beetle, to become a dog, to become an ape' rather than 'lowering one's head' to be judged.⁶⁰

Deleuze begins discussion on becoming-animal as a form of infection or contagion which causes transformations of identity, a move away from hereditary: 'Propagation by epidemic, by contagion, has nothing to do with filiation by heredity, even if the two themes intermingle and require each other... contagion epidemic involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a micro-organism.'⁶¹ The narrative climax shows the boundary between Grenouille and his female victims to be unclear, indeed they become-imperceptible as identities relate to transformational thresholds, examples of Deleuze's becoming:

To find out about thresholds, we must experiment, which means always, necessarily, relationally or in encounters with others. We need new cognitive and sensorial mappings of the thresholds of sustainability for bodies-in-processes-of-transformation . . . Violence, pain and a touch of cruelty are part of this process.⁶²

The point is to think otherwise, to think away from the phenomenological subject-object correlation and live with the singularity of experience, just as Grenouille and the crowd are immersed in the moment of exaltation, together with the lost souls who have made it possible. Deleuze emphasises becoming as acts of construction and composition with becoming-woman the prime becoming: 'Although all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman.'⁶³ There is a sense of liberation in breaking away from the molar domination of the masculine to elevate feminine minoritarianism. In the process, it is the essence of women through fragrant saturation by which Grenouille dominates and drives the passion of the crowd. Becoming-woman is the insistent urge to break the binary idealism of representational thought, and unified subjectivity. In the process, both woman and man become otherwise, 'woman as a molar entity *has to become-woman* in order that man also becomes – or can become – woman.'⁶⁴

Grenouille's final incarnation partakes in the monstrous expansion of consciousness as s/he merges with the essence of victims to become-woman. It may well be in death Grenouille finally comes to actualise transition to the sweet smelling potion of perfume but it has become an essence of abomination. His movement from animal of the mud to expert collector of odours creates a superordinate regime of universal appeal but sidelines morality. Admirable success to move from zero to infinity is besmirched by destroying the body, liquefying victims in calculating, grotesque, self-indulgent premeditation. Sensuous pleasure sets in as a drug, a social and psychological balm extracted by means of moral corruption. In the same way as distasteful body odour subsists beneath its perfumed canopy, so the distasteful subject matter of horror serves as an artful, esoteric meditation on sensation and identity. 'The creation of art transcends the horror of its subject matter.'⁶⁵

Contrary to Deleuze's insistence that we are now plugged into the creative evolution of *élan vital*, we are also compelled to deal with sexual delirium, cannibalism and the death force. Deleuze explains the attraction of the monstrous as the appeal of difference, a move beyond normativity to conjure new images of thought, applicable to Grenouille who becomes-monstrous. Like the uncanny, the monstrous reveals hidden undercurrents of repression; personal and social fears of transgressions which stretch to the politics and morals of whole societies.⁶⁶ As a serial killer, Grenouille is an isolated individual, frequently excluded from the social but nonetheless always having to work within it to achieve his goals. When detected as the killer, he is immediately reviled but soon becomes revered for his great powers to bring pleasure to others; the criminal becomes the hero, pardoned of all evil. This methodical practitioner is held to be rational rather than demented, questioning the standing of aesthetics and its transgression of the moral order. Grenouille's artistic impulse disturbingly questions the moral norm of what means are used to achieve a desirable end:

Murder as an aesthetic experience, could be understood as an appearance of the sublime in the moral world of everyday life. . . . The murderer experiences an aesthetic suspension [which] is achieved by a decisive break with the ethical world. This aesthetic suspension is the experience of the sublime.⁶⁸

4. Conclusion

A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name, which does not mean that the species is abnormal, namely, the composition or hybridization of already known species. Simply, it shows itself – that is what the word monster means – it shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure.⁶⁹

For Deleuze, literature is no appealing distraction but an exploration of concepts and detailed cartography of sensation, an exploration in the becoming of thought. 'Das Parfum' explores the bizarre,

the novel and monstrous. In this connection, two opposing features surface; the parasite embodied by Grenouille as a barely human, fearful entity, and the incorporeal plane of consistency, the abstract machine with the potential to realize a cosmic force of love and beauty. Grenouille's artistic work of beauty is both creation and destruction, clinical murder without conscience in an attempt to reach perfection.⁷⁰ The pursuit of beauty is vilified after being idolised, broken in the mire after being admired from a distance. Beauty has been pursued and welcomed as the object of desire yet feared because of its potential threat to masculine dominance. The bodily essence extracted from corpses is the trace of impossibility; a still yearned for maternal body that once offered union and oneness as return to the oceanic state.

In this connection, sexuality is a striking component in Grenouille's mutations from being-animal to being-monstrous to being-woman. His transitions are partly masochistic, partly sadistic in keeping with the oppositional forces which course through 'Das Parfum'. As Deleuze explains, it is a mistake to regard the pleasure-pain complex as denoting transformation from sadism to masochism as complementary elements of one illness. They should be considered distinct from each other.⁷¹ The masochist's open flow of pain nurtures anticipation and fantasy, whereas the sadist expresses aggression by concretely destroying the fetish. Grenouille's masochism is best described as a state of waiting, preferring postponement in pursuit of ritual and routines. Pain and discomfort are the accepted prelude to pleasure but the expected pleasure of fantasy never materialises for him, desire is never fulfilled, and this leaves a gaping hole for sadism to set in. Fantasy now becomes aggressive power in the real world together with sadistic destruction.

'Das Parfum' is an aesthetic exploration of this destruction and subject dissolution. Its concept of sensation illumines Deleuze's own journey to express the meaning of virtuality and intensity through the proliferation of sites, surfaces, and perceptions. Grenouille has appointed himself the taker of life and creator of false appearance, his God-like faculties culminating in the awe he engenders and control over others. This is the Nietzschean overman, an attempt to make the fusion of perfume and Grenouille into the promise of a novel, transcendent being. Nietzsche's overman 'differs in nature from man, from the ego...he is a different subject...something other than the human type.'⁷²

The overman deconstructs in order to reconstruct. Deleuze is clear that Nietzsche's task lies in absolutely breaking down codification and extant norms to express something that cannot be codified, to invent a new body. But Grenouille never approximates this ideal, even as an aspiring corpuscle. His body is too porous, unrestrained seepage reflected in blood-letting rampages. His lack of language is expressed corporeally; limited, stammering expression and the grimace, the stoop that gradually straightens itself suggesting growing self-belief. Destroying the body flesh, dis-locating space, living in a temporal bubble, Grenouille denies interactive growth, negates social and cultural inscription, and removes the pride women take in their singularity. There is little or no containment from one phase to the other in the liquid flow connected by feelers of aromatic substance. As substitute for sexual relations Grenouille chooses absolute possession, transferring body into essence, killing those he lusts after thereby denying others any potential relationship which would threaten his own quest for ownership. The more perfume is the sexual surrogate the more it expands into universal ownership of the patriarchal, gender-dominating, masculine world view that Deleuze denounces with his notions of difference and minority literature. Deleuze takes pains to emphasise the need to recognise the undercurrent of actuality and the way in which literature, amongst other things, can capture the creative force of unconscious irrationality:

Every society is at once rational and irrational...Reason is always a region carved out of the irrational – not sheltered from the irrational at all, but traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium and drift...the rational is always the rationality of an irrational.⁷³

What is instructive here is the phenomenological aspect of the discourse of art in the framework of the discourse of being. Completing an artwork parallels the struggle to complete a life; but comple-

tion is never reached, always subject to interpretation, reframing, and existentially open before death. The artwork latches onto our perceivable world, through concepts, as a new way of thought, percepts as fresh ways of seeing and hearing, and affects as a new ways of feeling.⁷⁴ Perfume's fragrance is housed in a peripatetic avatar whose descent is the nomadic core of both the film and book, creating an expansive human sensorium, interrelating sight with smell and touch to become swarming, corporeal sensitivity: 'Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body...to the whole region of human perception and sensation...how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces...'.⁷⁵ The recording of these sensory surfaces does not rest solely with the aura of material production, derived from the cornucopia of herbs and spices. The artwork has retained its aura; Grenouille cannot shake off its homoplastic hold as it heaps revenge on its executioner. The carefully preserved ghosts of former lives now grip him from the beyond, erasing traces of the past to erupt in the moment of presence:

The scent is the inaccessible refuge of the *memoire involontaire*. It is unlikely it will associate itself with a visual image, of all sensual impressions it will ally itself only with the same scent. If the recognition of a scent is more privileged to provide consolation than any other recollection, this may be so because it deeply drugs the sense of time. A scent may drown years in the odour it recalls.⁷⁶

Ultimately, Grenouille acknowledges the pain of existence and disdain for life, choosing renunciation of all forms of becoming in favour of possession and total absorption. Perfume is the ultimate victor because, in actuating its virtuality, Grenouille-the-assembler, has only limited power to manipulate or achieve planned intention. The fragrance of perfume outlives him, surviving in the air, enveloping the crowd who destroy him, seductive witness to his misdeeds. Grenouille's pursuit of a beautiful artifact by dint of serial killing is achieved only by destruction, and his circle of desire finally returns him to his birthplace where his demise completes his descent. Perfume has transcended, reinforced as an overdetermined marker between the animate and inanimate; indomitable source for historical evidence and social evocation of signifying practices.

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Notes

¹ Proust (1922). p. 65.

² Süskind (1985). p. 22. The sense of smell has long been overshadowed by the primacy of vision especially associated with the 'Age of Enlightenment', the time of 'Das Parfum'. Ocularcentric discourse pervades thought from classical times, simultaneously embracing a multitude of diverse experience. The prime notion of seeing retains distance. The substantiality of being and objective reality give precedence to the present as it is visually experienced and fixes the fleeting moment 'against the fleeting succession of nonvisual sensation'. Jay (1994), p. 24.

³ Cokal (2010). P. 180.

⁴ Süskind (1985). p. 191. The sense of smell is recognised as a way of manipulating consumer behaviour, providing a non-visual, immersive experience, smell works 'on a subconscious level, reflecting the fact that smell is received and processed in the limbic part of the brain, which has strong connections with automatic affect and cognition.' Henshaw, Medway, Warnaby, Perkins (2016), pp. 154, 155.

⁵ Ibid. p. 161. The relationship of perfume to this stench alters through history, as we find aromas are culturally and historically determined. "Smell is not simply a biological and psychological phenomenon, though. Smell is cultural, hence a social and historical phenomenon. Odours are invested with cultural values and employed

- by societies as a means of and model for defining and interacting with the world." Classen, Howes, and Synnott (1994), p. 3.
- ⁶Ibid. p. 26.
- ⁷Deleuze and Guattari (1994), p. 164.
- ⁸Sauvagnargues (2005/2013), p. 16.
- ⁹Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986).
- ¹⁰Horkheimer & Adorno (1947/2002), p. 7.
- ¹¹Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2011). pp. 251, 254.
- ¹²Messier (2009), p. 25.
- ¹³While still supporting the surrealist drive to release repressed desires of the unconscious. Bataille's philosophy is more concerned with an appeal to the political rather than a revolt of the spirit. This is further reflected in Bataille's early criticism of surrealism's leading spokesman, Andre Breton, who he admonished for supporting surrealism as a form of idealism. Adamowicz (2005) Subsequently, Bataille argues that surrealism came to recognise 'the legitimacy of the organizational endeavours and even the principles of Marxist communism', though it still expressed a preference for 'values *above* the world of facts...' Bataille (1985), p. 33.
- ¹⁴Biles and Brintnall (2015), p. 2.
- ¹⁵Ibid. p. 4.
- ¹⁶Bataille (2018), p. 31. Like Deleuze, Bataille argues for expenditure, the release of violent passions, the erotic, and elation of society to the primeval.
- ¹⁷Bataille (1985). p. 237.
- ¹⁸Bataille (2018). P. 35.
- ¹⁹Süskind (1985). p. 249.
- ²⁰Deleuze (1981/2002), p. 32.
- ²¹Ibid. p. 33.
- ²²Süskind (1985). p. 25 (my emphasis)
- ²³Ibid. p. 44.
- ²⁴Deleuze (1964/2000).
- ²⁵Shaw (2008), p. 165.
- ²⁶Deleuze (1983/1986), p. 74.
- ²⁷Süskind (1985). p. 36.
- ²⁸Nietzsche (1901/1968), p. 7. Nietzsche speaks of the uncanny's disruptive reach in terms of the advent of European nihilism, a metaphor for what is intolerable in the modern condition.
- ²⁹Foster (1993), p. 7.
- ³⁰Ibid. p. 13.
- ³¹Popularised in Hitchcock's 'Vertigo'(1958) and referred to by Deleuze (1983/1986), pp. 21., 204.
- ³²Deleuze (1968/1994), p. 237.
- ³³Lambert (2011), p. 22
- ³⁴Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 283.
- ³⁵Süskind (1985). pp. 245, 249.
- ³⁶Ibid. p. 114.(my emphasis)
- ³⁷Ibid. p. 30.
- ³⁸Crawford (1984), p. 218.
- ³⁹Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986), p. 17.
- ⁴⁰Deleuze and Guattari (1968/1994), p. 237.(my emphasis)
- ⁴¹Ramey (2013), p. 181. Thought is only thought if it participates in the uncanny. Rather than analyse Hitchcock's masterpiece, 'Vertigo' Ramey chooses 'The Birds'(1962) to show that the uncanny should be recognised as referring to a fascination with the real rather than the fantasy of imagination. The potency of the uncanny focuses on 'intermediary zones, regions *between* psychic and non-psychic, cultural and natural, human and animal spheres.' Ibid. p. 186.
- ⁴²Freud (1917), p. 235.
- ⁴³Süskind (1985). p. 143.
- ⁴⁴Ibid. pp. 130, 135.(my emphasis).
- ⁴⁵Deleuze (1985/1989), pp. 71 – 73.
- ⁴⁶Deleuze, (1964/2000), p. 48.
- ⁴⁷Süskind (1985). Pp. 244, 245.

⁴⁸ Deleuze (1968/1994), p. 291.

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 7.

⁵⁰ Sholtz (2015), p. 166.

⁵¹ Süskind (1985), p. 145. A condescending, ironic nod to Bergson's *élan vital*, an evolutionary notion based on internal difference and the core unity of matter and spirit. Bergson (1907/1998).

⁵² Deleuze, (1967/1991).

⁵³ Süskind (1985), p. 48.

⁵⁴ Süskind (1985), p. 111.

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 161 (my emphasis). The move towards the force of desire and away from individual subjectivity, which replaces subjective phenomenology of the lifeworld, also 'serves a heuristic function, amounting... to a veritable hermeneutic system... the territoriality of an assemblage... reads exactly like a hermeneutic programme.' Buchanan (2000), p. 126. This encourages us to broaden the interpretive range of figurative functions in the artwork.

⁵⁶ For Deleuze the event is virtual, not materially graspable but recognised through impassive results or effects. To all intents, perfume carries the event, the virtuality for what becomes in its spatio-temporal realization a state of affairs. The essence of perfume floats through the air potentially affecting the state of affairs in different ways; harbinger of destruction and doom, or sublime avenue to romantic fulfilment, dependent on the nature of the composed strata and intentional correlate of modes of perception. This is beautifully caught by Süskind in his juxtaposition of Grenouille's hallucinatory, joyful ramblings which parallel his material deprivation.

⁵⁷ Deleuze's 'A Thousand Plateaus' was first published in French in 1980, Süskind's book was published in 1986.

⁵⁸ Süskind (1985), p. 23. (my emphasis)

⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 257. (my emphasis)

⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986), p. 12.

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), pp. 241–242.

⁶² Braidotti (2006), p. 137. The imperceptible displaces boundaries, breaking out of subjective skin to become other, an effacement of subjectivity which offers Grenouille, the persona juggler, the only possibility to find love. The drive to becoming is shown in the imperceptible, gaseous-image of perfume, a force of dematerialisation entering the ether. For Deleuze and Guattari: 'To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line.' Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 218.

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2011), p. 277. 'The monster is not just abhorrent, it is also enticing, a figure that calls to us, that invites recognition. Simultaneously threat and promise, the monster, as with the feminine, comes to embody those things which an ordered and limited life must try, and finally fail, to abject.' Shildrick (2002), p. 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 275–276.

⁶⁵ Gross (2010), p. 211. The idea of the monstrous indicates the present cultural fascination with otherness and difference, comprising as it does both dark and light aspects, at the very least an anxiety in contemporary culture. Braidotti posits the need for the affirmation of desire and creativity, to ask 'what we want to become, how to represent mutations, changes and transformations, rather than Being in its classical modes', to render 'a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity.' Braidotti (2002), p. 2.

⁶⁶ Shildrick (2018), p. 166. Yet the cover-up of perfume changes nothing, rather than a celebration of difference the monstrous may well be complicit with the normative order. 'I wonder if every recovery of the strange is also a form of cover-up.' (Ibid. p. 164).

⁶⁷ Stratton (1996), p. 84.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 95, 96. Stratton quotes from De Quincey's 'Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts' (1827), 'Everything in this world has two handles. Murder, for instance, may be laid hold of by its moral handle... and that, I confess, is its weak side; it may also be treated *aesthetically*, as the Germans call it – this is, in relation to good taste.' Ibid. p. 94.

⁶⁹ Derrida (1992/1995), p. 386.

⁷⁰ Charles Baudelaire, part of the decadent movement, writes: 'All that is beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, the taste for which the human animal draws from the womb of his mother, is natural in its origins. Virtue, on the contrary, is artificial... Evil is done effortlessly, naturally by fatality, the good is always the product of some art.' Baudelaire (1863/2010).

- ⁷¹ Deleuze (1967/1991). Grenouille's sexual aggression excludes rape. As Williams notes in her analysis of late 18th century Gothic framing, it is more in keeping with rape in the latin sense of 'rapere', to steal; Williams (1995), p. 229. Grenouille steals the soul and essence of his victims.
- ⁷² Deleuze (1963/1982), p. 163.
- ⁷³ Deleuze (2002/2004), p. 262.
- ⁷⁴ Deleuze (1990/1995), p. 165. 'Das Parfum' is an intricate, lavish network of parody and irony, with literary allusions ranging from Euripedes to Goethe, from Novalis to Baudelaire, Rilke and Hofmannsthal. Even more, Grenouille's life history is the history of the art movement itself: "From his early definition as an illegitimate nobody from the eighteenth century underclass he passes through a phase of Romantic dualism, then a phase of aesthetic dissolution, and finally he emerges as a postmodern cannibalized self." Ryan (1990), p. 401.
- ⁷⁵ Eagleton (1990), p. 13.
- ⁷⁶ Benjamin (1955/1992), p. 180. For Benjamin aura carries with it the history of its production.

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My Story and *Crazy Brave*: Unmasking Personas and Personalities

RANIA SABER AHMED ABDELRAHIM

Abstract: Kamala Das's *My Story* and Joy Harjo's *Crazy Brave* memoirs deserve their due acknowledgement. Kamala Das and Joy Harjo are similar in using the autobiographical nature where these memoirs act as their healing platforms and their first step towards confessional poetry. Kamala Das and Joy Harjo are two Indian female poets who bear witness to several movements that situate them within second-wave feminism and the civil rights movements of the 1960s.

Kamala Das is from India. Joy Harjo is a Native American poet from a tribe defined by the term "Indian," the original inhabitants of the American continent. However, both devise exaggerated sense of self to create defiant personas of rebellion, protest and revolt. It is a mid-century response to the severe social and political conditions in India and the United States. The question of 'Indianness' in postcolonial Indian poetry is raised: Who is the Indian, and how to be an Indian?

Kamala Das and Joy Harjo seek unattained love; the love of the self, the love of people and the land. Despite their agonies and traumas, they never forget their identities and personalities in the love game. They never even dissolve in the self of their lovers. They may appear as failures as part of their confessional poetry and autobiography. However, there is a focus on how these authors turn from victims to resisters against any form of domination. These native female poets manage to reconstruct their selves by manipulating and revolving around their agonies and failures. Their native womanhood is also asserted and revitalized through their autobiographies; their souls are healed and calmed down by adopting a hope and survival strategy.

This paper projects on several aspects, such as the treatment of ideas of life and death, alongside feminine agony and suffering. Personas in Kamala Das and Joy Harjo can name their work as pure autobiographical in full terms of the preoccupation with the self. They choose not to conceal elements of their life even from their psychiatrists; their masks are uncovered. Points of similarities are the sense of Indianness, similar themes, headings and titles of the poems, and adopting and excelling at using the colonizer's language. The differences lie in the poets' perspectives, contexts and aesthetics.

The Rogerian self-theory and the theories of personality focus on the person; it is a person-centred approach. It addresses questions in the two memoirs, *My Story* and *Crazy Brave*: How are the personal traits and behaviours revealed through the autobiographical content? What are the forces and factors that shape a personality? How does it develop? And the role of gender, cultural beliefs, and childhood practices in acquiring the aspect of individualism?

Keywords: Poetic personas, Indianness, theories of personality, the self, humanistic psychology approach

Introduction

The word "persona" goes back 1500 years and refers to a mask used by actors in a play. It is easy to see how persona came to refer to our outward appearance, the public face we display to the people around us (Schultz, p. 4). That's why removing this mask is studied in the autobiographical

content and unmasking the writers' personas. This paper discusses the poetic personas in Kamala Das's *My Story* (1977) and Joy Harjo's *Crazy Brave* (2013), in which they tell the truth and their "I" personas frankly appear.

Kamala Das and Joy Harjo are primarily Indian poets who may appear dissimilar; however, through a close reading of the crucial points in their memoirs, it is apparent that both unmask their true selves and the truth. This truth was the cause of conflict since Plato banned poets from his Republic for being liars for not telling the truth in philosophical terms. Carl Rogers's therapy of self sheds light on the concept of personas in the tendency of the inner selves' revelation through honest autobiographical content.

In female poets' autobiographies, the texts are multifaceted and polyphonic. There are diverse layers and levels of meaning. Kamala Das and Joy Harjo are two middle-class females who seek freedom through new avenues of personal experiences. They appear to the readers as the wives, the mothers, the daughters, the lovers and the sisters. However, autobiography is their haven to survive an illness, deaths of loved ones, and loss of identity, strength and beauty. It starts with self-awareness and consciousness. The female autobiography also differs in that women, in their path to construct selves, their writings have a loose structure. They are more like diaries, honest records of the moment which do not impose the next day on the previous day's record. Virginia Woolf described her *Diary* as: "Something loose-knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind" (Federici, 2018).

Rogers's self-theory considers the self and the personality development of an individual. There is always a tendency toward self-image, self-worth, positive regard and self-actualizing. Rogers is a pioneer humanistic psychotherapist who develops a person-centred approach (Rogers, 1951). He tends to construct the theory of ego. People, according to him, are urged and motivated by an innate tendency to develop an actualizing tendency (Schultz & Schultz, 2013). Women are more aware of the cracks and rifts that are internal and personal, and they paper over gaps in their personalities that they acquire in space and time. To define their selves, a woman is aware that she belongs to a group identity where the male is dominant. It is why they try to create a dual consciousness – the self that is different from the stereotypical prescription. As Sheila Rowbotham's book *Threads through Time: Writing on History and Autobiography* (1999) writes: "We experience tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity. We were all together in one place, were always in transit, immigrants into alien territory."

Males perceive women only as an "other," so they maintain their selves alone. The innate male sense of self is separate as they deny the presence of self in terms of relation. On the contrary, the female self comes in a relationship; it is like looking at the individual's self in the eyes of the other.

Specific questions are: What is the state of being a person? What are the characteristics and qualities that form a distinctive character? And what is the total of the person's physical, mental, emotional, and social traits?

The paper reaches key findings that Kamala Das's personality pass through the theory that clarifies that her personality tends to be more Western, mainly American. On the other hand, Joy Harjo appears to be American, but the tribal spirit and collectivism are apparent in her poetic products.

In this paper, I systematically review and evaluate Rogers's self-theory and the theories of personality. I suggest additional paths for research that might further promote the based autobiographical writings and personality psychology. I believe this paper is a reference that offers a guide of self and memoirs by female poets' related studies for future researchers.

"I" Persona in Das and Harjo

Kamala Das (1934–2009) is a leading Malayalam author from Kerala. Das began writing at the age of fourteen when she mastered writing many autobiographical works. She was one of the bold modern Indian women writers who contributed enormously to the growth of Indian poetry in English and self-expression. By writing a memoir, *My Story*, Das, was the cry for change and

innovation (*My Story*, p. xvi). Joy Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma May 9, 1951. Harjo is an American author of two memoirs; *Crazy Brave* and *Poet Warrior*. She is the first to hold that credit to the present as the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States. She is a member of the Muscogee Nation and a figure in the second wave of the literary Native American Renaissance of the late 20th century.

As opposed to Thomas Gray saying that Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, the paper investigates Kamala Das and Joy Harjo's blush seen through their personas and personalities. Personas, in Kamala Das and Joy Harjo, give voice to a self that speaks on the page and makes meaning of a subject. In Das's memoir, *My Story*, she writes: "People like us who believe in the essential dignity of human beings are always left isolated (190). Harjo, too, says: "I didn't want to hear it, and felt even more alone in the path I had chosen" (*Crazy Brave*, p. 145). Both female poets "empty themselves of all the secrets so that they could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscience" (Dwivedi, p. 123).

The importance of subjectivity and autobiographical content starts when the theorists and humanists, view the autobiographical content. Most psychologists have long recognized that some personality theories have a subjective component, which may reflect events in the theorist's life. Thus, they may draw on these events as a data source to describe and support their theory. Their viewpoint is likely to influence their perception to some degree. Personality theorists are also humans; they try to understand the personality theory fully. Then, we should learn something about the life of the person who proposed it.

Humanists raise questions like how personality develops. What are the forces and factors that shape your traits? How can it vary with the situation? And are there unique characteristics as personality may also include the idea of human uniqueness?

Carl Rogers's theories are brought here for discussion. They will also help define your life as well. According to Rogers, they are about the state of being a person and the characteristics and qualities that form a distinctive character. Carl Rogers, then, deals with the total of all the physical, mental, emotional, and social traits. Everything causes you to be a unique individual from everybody else. His theory is vital because he deals with talks about women who revised their ideas or rebelled against them. They also try to show the influence of age, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation.

William James was one of the greatest American psychologists who believed that biography was a crucial subject for anyone who attempts to study human nature. He argued that it was more indispensable to understand eminent persons' lives than to know their theories or systems if we wanted to learn about the different ways people approach human experience (Shultz, p. 30).

For Kamala Das, an autobiography at the age of 37 is unusual for a housewife poet. For Das, these monthly publications served a therapeutic and creative purpose. "Without people, poetry reading and music, this dome shall be a cold place (Kholi, p. xxvii). Writing an autobiography benefits her personality by saying: "This autobiography began to distract her mind from the fear of a sudden death as well as to clear her outstanding hospital bills" (*My Story* 123). Being confessional, Das and Harjo are a step ahead of confessional poets in how happily they meddled to satisfy that particular brand of readers who liked them and their honest approach; they were useless as housewives. They even could not pick up a teapot without gasping for breath. But writing was possible. And it certainly brought them happiness. They both lit the reading lamp in their sitting room and began to write about a new life, an unstained future.

The psychoanalytical theories tackle the impact of cultural differences on personality in child-rearing. It considers the individualistic culture in the United States, as in the case of Joy Harjo. The parents tend to be democratic and permissive in their child-rearing. In collectivist cultures, such as Kamala Das's culture, such as Asian, parental practices tend to be more authoritarian, restrictive and controlling (Liu & Guo, 2010). These differences in child-rearing practices and their values will influence the development of different kinds of personalities.

Childhood for Kamala Das, in her memoir, as well as Joy Harjo recounts how her early years — a difficult period with an alcoholic father and abusive stepfather, and the hardships of teen mother-

hood — caused her to suppress her artistic gifts and nearly brought her to the edge of a breaking point. Das reveals the physical growth and marriage and her sad experience as a young wedded girl by saying: Dress in sarees, / be girl, / Be wife, they said. / Be embroiderer, be cook, / Be a quarreler with servants. / Fit in, Oh, Belong, don't sit on walls or peep through our lace-draped windows. / Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better still, be Madhavikutty. / It is time to choose a name, a role (*The Old Playhouse*, p. 27).

However, she shows resistance and self-actualization from an early age as in the individualistic society. She recounts in her collections in "Sleeping in the Moonlight", first published in 1996, when she was fourteen, she ordered told to sleep in the moonlight would be to invite madness. Unlike her brother, who was 'wise and careful', she did the opposite and slept one night in the open quadrangle of Nalapat to feel how 'the ripened moon, trapped / In the horned branches of the Jack tree / blanched the sky and cooled my skin'. That incident confirms how strong she is by saying: "I am different / I am an entity" To unwrap 'the whatness of me within' from 'all the layers of sham grown like skins', therefore, was a way of 'unfrustrating' herself through her poetry by writing of the desired life, and thereby completing herself (Devindra lxx).

In her adolescence, Harjo says: "I marked myself once with a knife, disappearing into the adolescent sea of rage and destruction" (*Crazy Brave*, p. 91). Harjo also shows her viewpoint on her childhood and her memories with her abusive stepfather. It represents her strong resilience and courage to the best of what you have and find something you are fervent about. She says: "My stepfather watched me closely. I felt like prey. I had to be stealthy. Not to be anywhere near him alone, tempted to touch me in any manner" (*Crazy Brave*, p. 69).

These two female poets fiercely portrayed the emotional and sexual life of middle-class daughters and housewives. They resisted the male figures in their lives. For example, Kamala Das rejected her father's request to the editor to suspend the publication of her narrative. She did not disown the preface of *My Story* that arrested her sense of relief at having unburdened herself. Joy Harjo did the same with her abusive stepfather and how she faced harassment from her stepfather, not love. She writes as a victim of circumstances and sexual humiliations:

I began to have my plans to run away ... love, love, love the opposite of living in a house with a man who stalked about looking for reasons to beat us. My stepfather had started coming to my room after my mother left for work early in the morning, while my sister still slept. I'd curl into my stomach and hold my breath as he rubbed my back. I was going to have got out of there before anything else happened. He made my mother play Russian roulette with a loaded gun (*Crazy Brave*, pp. 80–81).

The personal explanation is a kind of Indianness in the Indian atmosphere. In his book, *Kamala Das and Her Poetry* (1983), A. N. Dwivedi talks about her family and the family tradition in an autobiography. Her father, who had married in 1928, belonged to a traditional family having an aristocratic atmosphere around it. Das writes: "My mother did not fall in love with my father; they are dissimilar and mismatched" (*My Story*, p. 5). Harjo describes her father-mother relationship as "I was close to my father through the end. He never negatively spoke of my mother" (*Crazy Brave*, p. 24). Das explains how her mother's timidity created an illusion of domestic harmony and produced half a dozen children with swarthy skin and ordinary features (Dwivedi, p. 1). She writes:

When I reached Malabar, my relatives looked askance at me. Why was I without my husband? Had my outspoken autobiography that had been heraldically serialized in a well-known Malayali journal, finally brought about a separation? Was my 24-year-old marriage on the rocks? (*My Story*, p. 190)

Harjo describes her family as in:

Every soul has a distinct song. Even the place called Tulsa has a song... I heard the soul that was to be my mother call out in heartbreak ballad... Though she was crazy in love with my father, she sensed the hard road ahead of them... I know I sometimes stand out on my father's side of the family, in the circles I travel in of Indian peoples, which puts me in a position to constantly have to prove myself ... (*Crazy*

Brave, p. 19). She continues to say: “My family is huge and grows each journey I make into the world. There would be no poetry without them” (*How We Became Human*, p. xvi).

The wife–husband relationship is as crucial as the parents’ relationship. Carl Rogers speaks about the importance of marriage as a special relationship; it carries with it the possibility of sustained growth and development. It is a kind of therapy if it is a better marriage that occurs between partners who are congruent themselves. There would be fewer impeding conditions of worth and be capable of genuine acceptance of others. However, when marriage is used to sustain incongruence or to reinforce existing defensive tendencies, it is less fulfilling and less likely to endure (Fadiman, pp. 433–434).

Kamala Das speaks about herself in the marriage structure, describing it:

When I was young and needed his companionship for my emotional stability, he had sent me away to my grandmother for six months, only to be able to devote even his soul to the completion of a Rural Credit Survey Committee Report which his favourite boss was at that time obsessed with. Such subservience to his superiors may have built up his lacklustre career briefly for a while, but it certainly destroyed my pride in him. (*My Story*, p. 188).

Das becomes a coward in marriage as she loses her identity and personality beneath her husband’s giant ego where she becomes a dwarf. Harjo describes her marriage type as in:

I discovered a love letter from my husband to the babysitter. I’d been paying her to take care of him. At least she kept the house clean, something he didn’t do before I hired her. But the betrayal marked the end, I didn’t see it at first, but I was set free. I left him (*Crazy Brave*, p. 137).

Kamala Das and Joy Harjo start to possess self-awareness and hence, challenge the norms and social constraints from within.

Personality in Das and Harjo

In this section, the paper focuses on individual personality traits and their impact on psychological health and predetermined behaviour patterns. It is no exaggeration to say that your personality is one of the most important. Everybody has one — a personality will help determine the boundaries of success and life fulfilment. The same importance is how others see us. We might conclude that personality refers to our external and visible characteristics, those aspects of us that other people can see. That’s to say one’s personality may be the mask we wear when we face the outside world.

There is a role of gender in shaping a personality in the US. The results showed that women from both countries displayed greater emotional complexity and intensity than men (Barrett, Lane, Sechrest, & Schwartz, 2000). Women are more often diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and related disorders than men. The differential rate may be related to gender bias or gender stereotyping in interpreting the assessment results. Also, the therapists who recommend treatment options based on the assessment results may exhibit a biased stance against women (Friedman, p. 20). Genetic differences between people in collectivistic cultures cause lower levels of anxiety and depression in collectivistic cultures and higher levels in individualistic cultures (Chiao & Blizinsky, 2009).

Humanists argue that the case for Asians became much more “American” in their personalities. They changed in response to their changing culture (Gungor, Bornstein, De Leersnyder, Cote, Ceulemans, & Mesquita, 2013). Anxiety and negative emotions are also related to cultural differences. When Asians students were compared to those European American students in a daily diary study, Asian reported a far greater number of negative emotions in social situations than Europeans did (Lee, Okazaki, & Yoo, 2006).

Kamala Das claims that “each component obeys its destiny. The flowers blossom, scatter pollen and dry up. The fruits ripen and fall. The bark peels as each of us shall obey that colossal wisdom and the source of all consciousness” (*My Story*, p. 213). Harjo expresses her rejection of her Native people as “trespassers in the promised land,” as she writes in her 1990 collection, *In Mad Love and War*. She goes on to say: “No one was Indian. You’d best forget, claim a white star.” This is best being haunted

and overwhelmed by fear and anxiety in her memoir. She says: "I returned to the house of my step-father, secretly pregnant by my Cherokee boyfriend and with no plans, no idea at all as to where I was going or how I was going to get there (*Crazy Brave*, p. 115).

Rogers suggests that this commitment is expressed as: "We each commit ourselves to work together on the changing process of our present relationship because that relationship is currently enriching our love and our life. We wish it to grow." (Fadiman, p. 434) Das confesses that bad marriage results in falling in love with many men other than her lawfully wedded husband. She decided to be unfaithful to him, at least physically (*My Story*, p. 123).

Self-enhancement is the tendency to promote oneself insistently and make one noticeable. It is to agree more with the cultural values of Asian societies. It is self-enhancement versus self-criticism (Church et al., 2014). Kamala Das adjusts her individuality and keeps criticizing herself by saying: "My heart remains 'an empty cistern' and a dry well devoid of the waters of life 'coiling snakes of silence.'" She adds: "Who can help us who have lived so long and have failed in love?" Harjo criticizes herself by saying: "When there was an opening in the traffic, I sprinted across the street. My lungs were panicked butterflies in gale-force winds. I hugged myself. I was alive, but, to my dismay, so was the panic. I'd only succeeded in running from one island of panic to the next" (*Crazy Brave*, p. 151).

The Expression of feelings through autobiography is open communication. Rogers says: "I will risk myself by endeavouring to communicate any persistent feeling, positive or negative. Then I will risk further by trying to understand, with all the empathy I can bring to bear. Her response is accusatory, critical and self-revealing" (Friedman, p. 434). Harjo writes: "The struggle was private and disturbing. She was always concerned about her. She asked: 'Would she make it? And what does 'make it' mean in the scheme of the world? Perhaps 'not making it' in one world was food for making it in another. When her spirit broke free, she was tattered, raw, and beautiful" (*How We Became Human*, p. xxi).

Communication has two equally important phases: The first is to express emotion and the second is to remain open to experience the other's response. The inner turmoil for Kamala Das followed a nervous breakdown followed by a psychiatrist helping a longish story in Malabar. She doubted the reality of the world outside draws and wrote poetry poems that picture demons mating with snakes. As her health deteriorated, she reflected on her scars of operations and had spectres of death. She recalled the old playhouse of my mind, echoing the hollowness of room 565 of a Bombay hospital that told her story in verse with her fiercely outspoken poems (Dwivedi, p. xxiv).

Rogers is not simply advocating the acting out of feelings. He is suggesting that one must be concerned about how one's feelings affect one's partner. It is difficult simply by "letting off steam" or being "open and honest." Both partners must be willing to accept the real risks involved: rejection, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and retribution (Friedman, p. 434).

Rogers discusses the non-acceptance of roles, as in "we will live by our own choices, the deepest organismic sensing of which we are capable, but we will not be shaped by the wishes, the rules, the roles which others are all too eager to thrust upon us" (Rogers 1972, p. 260). He also discusses how one can become a separate self. It is the most challenging of the commitments, dedication to removing masks as soon and as often as created. For example, Kamala Das possessed the early signs of peculiarity. She writes: "Why don't you join the others? What a peculiar child you are.

Further, she writes: "And the white sun filled my eyes with its loneliness. I rose and walked toward my teacher. The children stared at me. The teacher laughed, and as though it was a signal for them to begin laughing too, they broke into high laughter. The birds on the trees flew away" (*My Story*, p. 10). She continues to say: "I stopped washing my hair. My husband told me that I was going mad. Perhaps I was, but it was not within my power to arrest its growth" (*My Story*, p. 98).

Rogers argues that emotions are the healthy individual is aware of her feelings, whether or not expressed. Kamala Das says: "The first chapter of darkness. This was to be a rape scene. I have a headache, I am miserably ill, I said. Won't you forgive me, child? He asked me. I was silent. Will you

talk about this to people, he asked me, whispering, but go away, go away. Then he fell asleep" (*My Story*, p. 101).

In the humanistic psychology approach, individualism, competitiveness and assertiveness are unin-
vited by Asian cultural standards. They are opposed to western cultures. Harjo, as an American, writes:

As I sat there alone in front box, of the story box, I became the healer, I became the patient, and I became the poem. I became aware of an opening within me. In a fast, narrow crack of perception, I knew this is what I was put here to do; I must become the poem, the music, and the dancer. I would understand how for a long time. This was when I began to write poetry (*Crazy Brave*, 154).

Any sense of assertiveness depicted in Kamala Das's work emphasizes the importance of individual-
ity (Kashima, Kokubo, Kashima, Boxall, Yamaguchi, & Macrae, 2004). This part investigates how Kamala Das as a person would never probably be judged as a malfunction. To me, Kamala Das appears as an individualistic person whom she travels in the opposite direction and works against the collective Asian society of India. She rejected this focus on group norms and values, group role expectations, and other cultural constraints on behaviour, as opposed to the Western individualistic society where the focus is on personal freedom, choice, and action. Kamala Das describes her acceptance of death as she writes:

Even our pains shall continue in those who have devoured us. The oft-repeated moves of every scattered cell shall give no power to escape from cages of involvement. We are trapped in immortality and our only freedom is the freedom to discompose (*My Story*, p. 210).

Harjo says:

I felt the demon grab hold of me and tug me with them into their lower world. I wrestled, struggled, and fought to get free. I got loose, leaped up, and turned on the light... I kept it to keep them away. They didn't like light. I could see their cold stares at the edge of the lamp... I woke up my guests with my noisy struggle with the demons... A Navajo roadman took care of me with prayers and the spirit of the peyote plant. The demons disappeared (*Crazy Brave*, p. 160).

As revealed from her autobiographical writings, Kamala Das possesses a fully functioning self with distinct characteristics. She appears to have openness to experience. Rogers argues: "A person is more open to his feelings of fear, discouragement and pain. Das is also more open to his feelings of courage, tenderness, and awe. She adds: "more able fully to live the experience of his organism rather than shutting them out of awareness" (Rogers 1961, p. 188). This is apparent in Das's words as she says: "I yearned for adventure; I wanted to fling myself into danger (*My Story*, p. 111).

A second characteristic is living in the present—fully realizing each moment. Das writes: Once or twice near him with his arms around my shoulders I whispered, I am yours, do with me as you will, make love to me. But he said, no, in my eyes, you are a goddess, I shall not dishonour your body (*My Story*, p. 109). In her poem "An Introduction," she entirely reveals the mask with an overt and undis-
guised self. It is the inner urge of rights of women to write this type of poetry. 'I am Indian, very brown, born in /Malabar, I speak three languages, write in / Two, dream in one" (An Introduction, p. 141).

Trusting is in one's inner urgings and intuitive judgments to make decisions. In Kamala Das's autobiographical and self-based writings, Rogers argues, that "the good life is a process, not a stole of being. It is a direction, not a destination (Rogers, 1961, p. 186). She writes in *My Story*: "Tragedy is not death but growth and the growing out of needs, but after total recovery" (p. 107). She muses: "One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only those who have decided to travel inwards will realize that his route has no end" (*My Story*, p. 109). Harjo, on her part, says:

I've come to realize that what has motivated my art-making is a strong need for justice, for people to be treated [with respect.] And then when I say people, I also mean animals and insects and the birds and the earth and the earth person that we are all part of — that there's a key element and that's respect (*Poet Warrior: A Memoir*).

Conclusion

The similarity between the works of Indian Confessional authors Kamala Das and that of the Indian-American culture of Joy Harjo is apparent. Personas and personality traits highlight the disintegration of the social institutions of love and marriage using many similar phrases. Love, marriage and male and female relationship are a deceptive passion that lands a woman into uncertain marital connection. Both of them believe that women have the potential to overcome barriers and limitations and accomplish what they yearn for; they are complete in themselves. This sense of completeness, self-realization and self-actualization revives a woman like a legendary. They are a legacy, muses and phoenixes who die and rise from their ashes again. Poetry of women poets like that of Kamala Das and Joy Harjo unleashes the true nature of a female to rediscover their potential and power. Their memoirs, *My Story* and *Crazy Brave* reveal anxiety of identity as the most prominent feature of modern literature. Women writers, especially Kamala Das and Joy Harjo, have expressed the desire to break the silence and cross the patriarchal threshold in their contribution to literature. To conclude, Kamala Das's and Joy Harjo's writings remain a virgin area to be explored and assessed afresh.

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‘La Chingada’ and ‘Machismo’: Mexican Male Homosexuality vis-à-vis Hypermasculinity in Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

ANIL PRADHAN

Abstract: This article attempts to understand the Mexican concept of *La Chingada* or *Hijos de la chingada* (The children of the fucked one) as used by Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz in *El laberinto de la soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude) in the context of Mexican hypermasculinity and male homosexuality. Mexican ‘machismo’ is commented upon by Paz as being rooted in the idea of the dominant-male/passive-female dichotomy and informed by a power dynamic where sexual penetration becomes a metaphor for conquest. Paz’s idea of homosexuality being tolerated seems coloured by an understanding that non-heteronormative sexual role-playing is admissible in the Mexican discourse of ‘male’-ness if it conforms to a heterosexualised view of power dynamic. This paper interrogates this perception of Mexican homosexuality vis-à-vis a colonial construction of hypermasculinity in the context of Paz’s ideas of the *Chingada* in order to uncover what he intended to show as Mexican national identity.

Keywords: Octavio Paz, Mexican, machismo, hypermasculinity, homosexuality

On 17 November 1901, Mexico City police arrested forty one men from a private party; half of these men were dressed as women (Irwin). ‘The Ball of the 41,’ as it came to be known, became an intriguing scandal and gained immense symbolic importance in Mexico so much so that “the number 41 came to signify male homosexuality” (Irwin 353). This scandal, that also came to be known as the ‘The Dance of the 41,’ was widely circulated in contemporary media propagating explicitly homophobic attitudes. However, the reports on the scandal came with an interesting divide of stereotyping. Robert M. Irwin has noted that the daily *El Popular* “was careful to separate the apparently masculine from the apparently feminine, the presumably active from the presumably passive” (365). Another daily *El Diario del Hogar* “referred to the transvestites repeatedly, albeit sarcastically, as ‘women’ or ‘ladies’” (Irwin 365). Though, as Irwin has noted, the social commentaries made it clear that all were to be considered criminals, and indeed all of the 41 men were convicted and conscripted into the army, one particular daily, *La Patria*, had claimed that “nineteen effeminate men were sent to Yucatan to work in the mess halls, while twenty-two more masculine ones were sent as soldiers” to fight the Maya Indians (365). Nevertheless, the general angst was that, as voiced by *El Hijo del Ahuizote*, “the nation ought to honor with its uniform neither those who have degraded themselves with rouge and the dresses of prostitutes nor those who have served as their partners” (Irwin 365).

Apart from the dailies, the anti-homosexual novel *Los cuarenta y uno* (The 41) by Eduardo A. Castrejón maintained that those who were not dressed in drag remained at the party because they were “content [...] to find themselves among their own kind of people” (Irwin 365). This view, as Irwin puts it, “suggests that effeminate men were viewed and treated differently from masculine ones; however, they were still seen as men dancing with men (and, by implication, as men having sexual relations with men), and both groups were punished as homosexuals” (365). However, one cannot

but notice the hierarchical nature of the sexual norms which became visible after such a non-normative scandal and its subsequent controversies, which brought to the fore a vivid stereotype of homosexuality as male effeminacy and, by implication, as passivity during anal intercourse which has been pivotal in the discourse on Mexican male homosexuality ever since. This event seems to have initiated the first significant discussion of same-sex sexual relations in postcolonial Mexico and raised questions about sexuality, masculinity, and Mexican-ness. A similar idea of Mexican masculinity finds mention, almost half a century later, in the celebrated Mexican writer Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), first published in 1950. The text elaborates upon some very important ideas of the Mexican hypermasculine 'machismo' identity and the relative views on what is considered by the Mexicans as non-masculine in the homosexual. Paz, in doing so, is considered to have introduced homosexuality into mainstream intellectual discourse in Mexico. Though the Mexican mestizo culture did not tolerate cross-gendered behaviour of openly non-normative sexuality, Paz's idea of masculine homosexuality being tolerated on the condition that it violates a passive agent seems coloured by an understanding that the non-conformant sexual role-playing is admissible in the Mexican discourse of male-ness if it conforms to a particularly discursive heterosexualised view of power politics. This article attempts at understanding this perception of Mexican homosexuality vis-à-vis a colonial construction of hypermasculinity and 'machismo' in the context of Paz's ideas of the *Chingada* in order to uncover what he intended to show as Mexican identity.

In the chapter titled "Mexican Masks," Paz contends that the Mexican male identity is that of concealment – "protecting" itself behind a "mask," because the ideal of the Mexican identity, by which he refers to the male, is to never "allow the outside world to *penetrate* his privacy" (30, emphasis added). In contrast, Paz comments that "women are inferior beings, in submitting they open themselves up" (30), projecting a view that for the Mexican male, 'opening up' is considered a weakness, is deteriorative of his manliness, and is almost metaphorical to allowing a conquest of masculinity. He further comments that the "Mexican *macho*– the male– is a hermetic being, closed up in himself" and that "manliness is judged according to one's invulnerability" (31, italics original). This fear of penetration echoes not only in socio-political terms but also in the context of sexual constructions of the masculinity of the Mexican *macho*. Paz further explains that the feminine is an object for the masculine as "she participates in their realisations only *passively*" (35, emphasis added). Later on, he mentions how, drawing from this idea of passivity in the Mexican society, "woman is never herself, whether lying stretched out or standing up straight, whether naked or fully clothed [...] she has no desires of her own" (37). In a way, "womanhood, unlike manhood, is never an end in itself" (Paz 36). The Mexican woman is, thus, "*submissive and open by nature*" (Paz 38, emphases added). The gendered idea that the Mexican *macho* identity is filtered and coloured by the notions of an active execution of power seems to be fundamental in understanding the sexual and social relations amongst the Mexicans, both cross-sex and same-sex.

Paz, himself, interestingly, links this idea of power politics of dominance to homosexuality in the Mexican context, which this article intends to investigate. He contends as follows:

It is likewise significant that masculine homosexuality is regarded with a certain indulgence insofar as the *active* agent is concerned. The *passive* agent is an *abject*, degraded being. This ambiguous conception is made clear in the word games or battles – full of obscene allusions and double meanings – that are so popular in Mexico City. Each of the speakers tries to *humiliate* his adversary with verbal traps and ingenious linguistic combinations, and the *loser* is the person who cannot think of a comeback, who has to swallow his opponent's jibes. These jibes are full of *aggressive sexual allusions*; the loser is *possessed*, is *violated*, by the *winner*, and the spectators laugh and sneer at him. Masculine homosexuality is *tolerated*, then, on the condition that it consists in *violating a passive agent*. (39–40, emphases added)

This apparent exception ascribed by Paz to the active male sodomiser is directly linked to the construction of the Mexican *macho* identity – the one who penetrates and opens up the inferior object of desire, implicitly highlighting the clear connection between the woman and the passive

gay man, who both become the degraded ‘Other’: the penetrated, open, and conquered entity due to the loss of masculinity. Raewyn W. Connell reminds us that masculinity is “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture” (71). In this context, the ‘machismo’ of the Mexican hypermasculine construction, thus, gets inextricably linked to the polarised politics of domination and subjugation, in the contexts of the public and the private, the socio-political and the sexual, and the heterosexual and the homosexual. However, the elevated *chingon* is seen to retain or even reinforce his masculinity. Irwin reiterates, “all actual male homosexual relations, for Paz and his followers, involve anal penetration [...] The ‘passive’ partner is an effeminate homosexual, and the ‘active’ one is masculine and remains unmarked by homosexuality” (355). Use of stigmatising words like *puto*, *joto*, *maricon*, etc., for those sodomised and contrastively valorising words like *mayate*, *chichifo*, *chingon*, etc., which are free of stigma, for the sodomisers testify to the strict structuration of the active/passive axis. The constructs of the active/passive and the winner/loser seem to be not only implicitly related to the sexual matrix of power politics in the context of the male/female, and subsequently the male/male, but also informed by the ideas of conquest, undoubtedly with reference to the Spanish colonial rule in Mexico, which Paz discusses in the chapter titled “The Sons of La Malinche.”

Commenting upon how history helps “clarify the origins of many of [Mexican] phantasms,” Paz accepts that “in many instances these phantasms are vestiges of past realities” and that “their origins are in the Conquest, the Colonial period [...]” (73). Alluding to the popular word games called *albures*, Paz provides the source of such linguistic obscenities, as meted out to the violated passive agents, to be of a historical nature, directly related to the Spanish colonial era. The slangs that Mexicans men use during the *albures* in *fiestas* – in which men match wits with each other and the loser always ends up being symbolically *chingado* by his interlocutor, and thereby made into a woman or an effeminate homosexual – are drawn from the “anger, joy or enthusiasm” which “cause us to exalt [their] conditions as Mexicans” (74). He provides the example of the phrase “*Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada!*,” about which he comments as such:

When we shout this cry on the fifteenth of September, the anniversary of our independence, we affirm ourselves in front of, against and in spite of the “others.” Who are the “others”? They are the *hijos de la chingada*: strangers, bad Mexicans, our enemies, our rivals. [...] And these “others” are not defined except as the sons of a mother as vague and indeterminate as themselves. (75, italics original)

Paz comments that the *Chingada* is “the mother who has suffered – metaphorically and actually – the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her her name” (75). Amidst the plurality of meanings, the verb *chingar*, as Paz notes, “ultimately contains the idea of aggression;” it “denotes violence, [...] to penetrate another by force” and also means “to injure, to lacerate, to violate” (77, emphases added), entailing sexual connotations of violence. Paz notes that the “*chingon* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless” (77, italics original). The verb *chingar*, thus, primarily and importantly signifies the triumph, the conquest of the powerful, closed ‘machismo’ over the defeated and open non-macho. The idea is that one has to ‘*chingar*’ the other in order to avoid being the ‘*chingado*.’ In other words, the “‘macho’ is a ‘macho’ in relation to another man, whom he must symbolically *chingar* [...] to keep his macho attributes” (Dominguez-Ruvalcaba 107). The binary of the *chingon*/*chingado*, therefore, becomes an indirect allusion to ‘*victimario*/victim.’ The passivity of the *Chingada*, Paz further notes, is abject, which “causes her to lose her identity [...] her name” and “disappear into nothingness” (85–86, italics original). However, contrary to the Paz’s reflection about leaving women out of the *chingon*/*chingado* binary which gives the impression that they do not interfere in men’s conformation of their masculinities, it might be noticed that “men construct their masculinities in response, and quite often in contrast, to the women around them” (Navarro 101).

The *Chingada* is “the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived” and the *hijo de la Chingada* is, then, “the offspring of violation, abduction or deceit” (Paz 79, italics original). Thus, the sarcastic humiliation of the Mother seems to affirm to the violence of the Father. In this context Paz comments that “the *macho* represents the masculine pole of life [...] the *macho* is the *gran chingon*” summing up the “aggressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability and [...] power” (81, italics original, last emphasis added). The essential attribute of the *macho*, thus, is power, and reveals itself as a capacity for wounding and humiliating. Richard Basham, commenting upon the discourse of the ‘machismo,’ notes an important relation between the woman-mother figure of the passive and the male-macho figure of the active: “*El Macho* is diametrically opposed to that of *La Madre*, [...] impenetrable, enclosed within himself [...] defensive, dominating, unpredictable, and arbitrary” (133, italics original).

Paz, interestingly, points out that “it is impossible not to notice the resemblance between the figure of the *macho* and that of the Spanish conquistador” (82, italics original), where the *chingone* becomes metaphorically linked to the Spanish colonial penetration and domination of Mexico. In this context, Paz presents the example of the mythically historical character of Dona Malinche, the coastal woman who became the mistress of the Spaniard Hernan Cortes who had dethroned, tortured, and murdered the young Aztec emperor Cuauhtemoc. He comments as such:

Dona Marina (Malinche) becomes a figure representing the Indian women, who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards [...] the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the *chingado*, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians. (86, italics original)

However, Paz concludes, rather ambiguously and self-contrastingly, that when the Mexicans shout “*Viva Mexico, hijos de la Chingada!*,” they “express their desire to live closed off from the outside world” and adds that the “Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard [...] he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an abstraction” (86–87, italics original). The purpose of the article in detailing this myth-legend is not to deviate from the focus on the Mexican ideas of ‘machismo’ and homosexuality it intends to explore but to provide a crucial factor involved, implicitly, in the ideology of hypermasculinity and ‘machismo’ as derived from the allusions to Spanish conquest, involved in the construction of the Mexican identity, i.e., of the notion of separation and negation based on a historically derived idea of power, domination, and identity. The references to Malinche, Cortes, etc., show how “historical characters have become myths that occupy the centre of an unresolved psychic conflict” in the Mexican identity (Stanton 228). The Mexican identity emerging from these understandings gives an idea of unresolved duality that, as Paz has noted, is “a struggle between the forms and formulas that have been imposed on [Mexicans] and the explosions with which [their] individuality avenges itself” (33). The Mexican moral and judicial forms often “conflict with their nature,” “frustrating their true wishes” and preventing them from truly expressing themselves (Paz 33). The resultant politics of *indigenismo* creates the Mexican *mestizo* identity that is at once hybrid and not quite so and yet is projected as “the symbol of national unity and is therefore the privileged referent in the construction of political and cultural subjecthood” (Taylor 824). Gutierrez comments that “in Mexico the symbolic creation attributed to Malinche—the mestizo race—still plays a key ideological role in modern politics” as an “antithesis of racist discourses and it has the capacity to incorporate differences and to reject racial puritanisms” (qtd. in Taylor 825). However, Paz does not consider either the independence movement or the Mexican Revolution as “a genuine liberation moving towards the achievement of an authentic national identity” (Hoy 372).

Thus, the masks that the Mexicans put on due to lack of an authentic national identity (also owing to the ‘fallen’ nature of their illegitimate origin) propagates the lying which Paz notes “plays a decisive role in [their] daily lives, [their] politics, [their] love-affairs and [their] friendships,” deceiving themselves as well as others (40). Although, according to Paz, there seems to be an indissoluble relationship between ‘machismo’ and homo-eroticism, Mexican ‘machismo’ seems to be one of those masks that Paz talks about, where the hypermasculinity of the active *macho* figure strives to dominate and projects its superiority over the passive, which, in the context of non-heteronormative

sexuality, comes out as a self-contrastive excuse for maintaining hegemonic male-driven stability. Terry Hoy, in the context of the Mexican identity has noted as such:

Mexican history is the expression of a collective inferiority complex stemming from the results of the Spanish conquest, racial mixture and a disadvantageous geographical position. In hiding their inferiority, Mexicans have resorted to unhealthy compensations including aggressive assertions of power that have isolated Mexicans from one another and prevented the attainment of a sense of community. (371)

In this play of power, however, the gendered notion of the 'abject,' as discussed earlier, that is replicated in the power politics implicit in the *chingon/chingado* discourse of 'machismo' and non-heteronormative sexuality of men is non-absolute. Through Julia Kristeva's discussion of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, Judith Butler reminds us that though the 'abject' "designates that which has been expelled from the body, [...] literally rendered 'Other'," "the alien is effectively established through this expulsion" (169). In a similar understanding, Paz's *chingon/chingado* binary does not seem to adequately explicate the politics of Mexican masculinities. Considering the case of the Mexican ideas on homosexuality, where the passive agent is stigmatised and otherised, the discourse of hegemonic 'machismo' seems to be applied specifically to validate the duality of a hypermasculine identity. Eduardo de Jesus Douglas, while commenting on the art of Nahum B. Zenil (who is one of the few openly gay older generation activists/artists in Mexico), points out that "for a man to touch, to desire, or to accept the penis is to sever the 'natural' link between maleness and the macho ethos of penetration" (18). In order to facilitate it, the Mexican non-heteronormative man, thus, marks himself as an 'Other' to experience both subjective authentication and objective emasculation. The Mexican *macho*, thus, constructs and strives to maintain a constructed and contingent idea of the superiority of the hypermasculine, in order to accommodate the abject, non-normative, homosexual masculinity. In this context, Basham notes that "the cult of machismo has often been explained as a reaction to deep-seated fears of inadequacy and latent homosexuality" (127), where the fear seems to instigate further execution of the honour-power model of 'machismo' in Mexico.

Looking into the history of homosexuality and its reception in Mexico, in the context of the pre-conquest era, there can be found evidences that the Mexicans worshipped a deity, Xochiquetzal (feathered flower of the maguey), who was the goddess of non-procreative sexuality and love. Stephen Murray notes that "Xochiquetzal was both male and female at the same time, and in her male aspect (called Xochipilli), s/he was worshipped as the deity of male homosexuality and male prostitution" (1). It was only after the colonisation of Mexico by the Spanish that homosexuality was thoroughly criminalised. Murray notes this:

The Spaniards condemned homosexuality more vociferously than the Aztecs had. After the conquest, all pagan rituals were banished and their rationale discredited. Mestizo culture came to exhibit a melding of Aztec attitudes towards private homosexuality and those of the Spaniards. The former ritual tradition that celebrated homosexuality as communion with the gods was lost. (2)

This attitude of the Spaniards seems to have been religiously copied into the *macho* ethos of the resulting post-colonial Mexican masculine identity. Notwithstanding the fact that the dominant conception of homosexuality in Mexico as necessarily related to gender-crossing – the simplistic *activo-pasivo* logic, as the research of sociologists like Annick Prieur testifies, Murray has pointed out towards an interesting fact regarding the perceptions on Mexican homosexuality which pertains to the recognition that some seemingly ultra-masculine men could be penetrated, as he states this:

This phenomenon of 'flipping' is frequently discussed among male transvestite prostitutes, and the pleasure of 'surrender' to penetration is not inconceivable to masculine-appearing males [...] There is even a term, *hechizos* (made ones), for former *mayates* (insertors) who have become passive partners in anal intercourse over time. (4, italics original)

This category of men having sexual relations with other men challenges the traditional Mexican construction of the active/passive that Paz has commented upon. Research by anthropologists like

Joseph Carrier and Clark Taylor has brought out such deviations from the 'machismo' model. These "men who assumed both roles were called 'anal active and passive' by Carrier and later *internacionales* by Taylor" (qtd. in Carrillo 223, *italics original*), which highlighted an anomaly in the traditional system of categorisation. For Taylor, "the use of the term *internacional* seems to denote both variety and foreignness," which suggested that "it was a departure from the well-defined gender roles and thus was presumed to be a foreign import" (qtd. in Carrillo 223, *italics original*). For Carrier, the category of the international was a result of "the growing influence of U.S. and Western European gay culture in Mexico" (Irwin 366). Commenting upon whether the Mexican traditional perceptions of homosexual identities were being abandoned, Hector Carrillo's research pointed out that the answer is both yes and no, similar to Paz's commentary on the duality of the Mexican identity. Carrillo notes this:

On the one hand, Mexican gays and lesbians are increasingly conceptualizing 'modern' homosexual identities – identities to which they refer with the Spanish words *homosexual*, *lesbiana* and *gay* – that are based on their attraction to their own sex regardless of their gender roles [...] but, on the other hand, norms and values based on gender roles, which could be characterized as 'traditional', continue to inform and influence contemporary perceptions of homosexuality and to provide options for individuals' interpretations of their desire toward members of their own sex. (227, *italics original*)

Carrillo's ethnographic research, which involved several interviews with men who had same-sex relations with men in Guadalajara in the 1990s, found that there exists a duality or hybridity in homosexual identity politics in the Mexican society. Carrillo held that this "hybridity favours the adoption of a dual identity and strongly shapes what is seen by contemporary Mexicans as modern homosexuality" (228). This concept of hybridity and overlapping sexual system results from combining both traditional active/passive model and the modern categorisations of gender fluidity.

Therefore, it follows that there are two conflicting views of homosexuality in Mexico: one relegates men who desire other men as a negative and shameful social reality, while the other regards men who sodomise/penetrate other men to still 'remain men' in contrast to the feminised sodomised non-man. In the example of 'The Dance of the 41,' there had been projected similar inter-contradictory yet conciliatory views on the (homo)sexuality of the 41 men who were convicted. Though the daily *El Popular* attempted to rationalise the twenty-two 'masculine' men at the dance by insisting that "they had been tricked, that they had not knowingly reveled with queers, as if their complicity would have incriminated them," yet "nowhere did anyone argue about whether all forty-one were homosexuals or just nineteen of them; both views were held to be true" (Irwin 365). Similarly, Paz's view, in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, that the active penetrating role of the *macho* in (homo)sexual intercourse with a passive *joto* is seen as a source of honor and power and an affirmation of masculinity (and thus holds no stigma) holds true to only a certain extent. According to Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, "the scandal produced a disempowerment and symbolized a defeat of the dominator, using the sexual metaphor on which Octavio Paz [...] concurs" (68). Furthermore, complication arises in the context of bisexuality. Prieur notes that "male bisexuality in Mexico is neither socially accepted nor stigmatized [...] but only so long as it remains relatively invisible, so long as it is kept within a purely male context [...] and so long as it is euphemized" (qtd. in Irwin 366).

Moreover, critics like Irwin have pointed out that Paz's characterisation of Mexican homosexual-ity can indeed be an inadequate categorisation. He questions: "Why shouldn't homosexual penetration be essentialized by avowed heterosexuals (such as Paz) for whom penetration is imperative for the purpose of procreation" (369). This prefaces the consideration that "even if Paz's sexual symbolism of anal penetration is taken as a cultural dominant, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which it is or was reflected in sexual practices" (369). Moreover, Martin A. Nesvig has noted that Paz's "propositions about the essential nature of Mexican sexual identity have cast a tremendous shadow over the historiography and ethnography of Mexican and Latin American sexuality" (691), and scholarly and anthropological works as that of Carrier seem to have drawn their basic ideas, rather inadequately, from Paz.

Sociologists and critics like Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, Carlos Decena, Hector Carrillo, and Tomas Almaguer have discussed about this problem of essentialised Mexican homosexual identity. Decena and Carrillo concur that “there is a certain oversimplification in the construction of the active/pasivo model” that has left “little room for considering the complexities of interpretation and categorization in relation to sexual identities and forms of self-identifications” (Vidal-Ortiz et al. 255). In the same context, Vidal-Ortiz talks about an expansion in this idea of the *activo/pasivo* which has been circulating in such a way that it is being embraced to include a broader understanding of Mexican homosexuality (Vidal-Ortiz et al. 256). Carrillo seconds this point and notes that the sexual connotations of the *activo/pasivo* model must not be essentialised for the purpose of constructing homosexual identities, by the members of both the LGBTQ2S+ community and the academia. Commenting upon how the binary must not become the all for the understanding of Mexican or Latino cultures, Almaguer is of the view that “homosexuality has cross-culturally and historically been structured in fundamentally different ways and that the active/pasivo [...] reflects just one of the particular modalities and poetics of difference” (Vidal-Ortiz et al. 258). Carrillo proposes the possible solution as considering “simultaneously active/pasivo, disclosure/secrecy, gender-based/object choice categorizations, and globalization/locality, all at the same time and as part of the same thing” and “seeing gay in connection to contemporary homosexualities in the way that they emerge in different sites around the world and reconstituted to reflect local conditions” (Vidal-Ortiz et al. 262). This, Carrillo claims, would facilitate an interplay that would allow “for local forms of contemporary homosexualities or gayness to emerge, without necessarily having to follow ‘hegemonic’ models” (Vidal-Ortiz et al. 265).

When Paz noted that the true Mexican identity revealed itself during *fiestas*, which can be considered as a carnivalesque scenario, in which “the very notion of order disappears,” he has written that “Men disguise themselves as women, masters as slaves, poor as rich” and that “anything is permitted: the customary hierarchies vanish along with all social, sex, caste and trade distinctions” (51). Paz’s example of chaos as transvestism is interesting, for this is the same non-normative unmasking of the Mexican identity one witnesses in the scandal of ‘The Dance of the 41.’ While Paz’s structured version of homosexuality may represent one Mexican perspective on homosexuality, a significant competing perspective emerges, as Irwin notes, where “the transvestites’ challenge to this social order permits the freedom of *carnaval*, of sexual liberty; as Paz puts it, ‘Society is dissolved’” (370, *italics original*). Similarly, the men in ‘The Dance of the 41’ had not only subverted gender roles but also opened up a new discourse on the complex relations between non-heteronormative sexuality and constructs of masculinity and femininity in the Mexican context. Furthermore, as Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui has pointed out with respect to ‘The Dance of the 41’ and its deep impact on Mexican socio-cultural imagination, “Transvestism as a misfire of ‘masculinity’ does not exactly mean ‘castration’ (something is not missing; it is hidden),” and, as such, “the acts of the ‘41’ cannot be simply understood as an absence; rather, from a politically progressive stance, the ‘41’ are an enactment of a gender difference” (23) – a difference that challenges the intricate pact among hegemonic patriarchy, hypermasculinity, and homophobia.

Thus, upon interrogating the dualities within the constructs of ‘machismo’ and hypermasculinity and the dichotomies that they strive to sustain, the Mexican construct of homosexuality actually opens up a discourse of contradictions, percolated through a multitude of socio-cultural, mythical, historical, political, and sexual considerations, always already informed by the dynamics of gender. One would not only need to consider the simplistic active/passive model mentioned by Octavio Paz but also interrogate the more complex and intricate politics of intersectionality of the social, the political, the personal, the cultural, the historical, the sexual, and the economic, which stands witness to the multiverse of Mexican non-heteronormative subjectivities.

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Multiple Femininities and “Unruly Woman” as Theoretical Framework

JESSICA RUTH AUSTIN

Abstract: Scrutiny of representations of gender in video games has increased in academic scholarship in recent years. Scholarship has moved beyond the early questions of whether video games promote violence simply for showing violence but now question how representations of acts and ideas within video games can have importance to cultural understanding as well. The *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* was released by CD Projekt Red in 2015 based on the novels by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. The game was universally well received and has shifted more than 10 million copies worldwide. Critics of the game stated however, that as with criticisms of previous games in the franchise, that representations of women could be viewed as sexist. This article analyses the representation of women in *Witcher 3* in particular and argues that these women are often examples of the ‘unruly women’ as theorised by Kathleen Rowe. This article argues that representations of women in *Witcher 3* are narratively driven rather than for sexist shock value and that they are active characters rather than being passively carried through the storyline. This article argues for using “unruly woman” as a theoretical framework as it provides deeper analysis than content, which has previously been used in video game analysis. This article argues that multiple femininities and plural identities are identified using “unruly woman”.

Keywords: Game Studies, Femininities, Representation, Sexism, Gaming, *Witcher 3*

Introduction

In popular culture analysis, we have found ourselves at a crossroads in feminist critique when it comes to female sexuality on screen. Kathleen Rowe states that this has come from a generational gap between older feminists and those who were born in the millennium. She notes that many older theories decry any female sexuality or sexual interaction as solely for the male gaze. However, this focus on negative aspects of female sexuality has led to a gap in our knowledge, especially when it comes to representations in video games. It is difficult in 2021 to argue that female characters are solely there to satisfy the male gaze when gamers are just as likely to be female as they are male.

In this article I suggest that analysing female video game character cannot simply be done by evaluating what these characters look like and that placing video game characters into a simple sexist vs non-sexist binary can inhibit deeper academic analysis. I argue here that the “unruly woman” created by Rowe is a theoretical framework which can be used for female characters in video games and use *The Witcher 3* as a case study to demonstrate its strengths as an analysis tool.

I also evaluate why the Bechdel Test is too simplistic when it comes to video game characters. Although it has been used effectively in evaluating films, it precludes the discussion of different types of femininities and the pluralities of gender found in the video game medium. *The Witcher 3* has been chosen to demonstrate this because it does in fact pass the Bechdel Test, despite being derided as sexist due to the state of undress of some of the female characters and dialogue choices. I recommend that the Bechdel Test should be abandoned for video game analysis in favour of using the “unruly woman” as theoretical framework instead.

The Unruly Woman as Theoretical Framework

The “unruly woman” was described by Rowe in her book *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (1995) to examine “the conventions that govern gender and laughter – or rather...the spectacle-making unruly woman and the comedic genres of laughter” (4a). Rowe articulates that what makes the unruly woman important (and feminist) is that she “lays claim to her own desire” (31a). Characters that she specifically points out in comedy texts are Miss Piggy and Roseanne as she notes that these characters do not have to be ‘nice’ to work towards their goals. In doing so, these female characters subvert the traditional stereotypes of female characters being overly feminine, polite and often (most offensively) being the “damsel in distress”. Importantly, Rowe states that although these characters are the pinnacle of “unruly” that there is a scale as to ‘how much’ different characters achieve these attributes. Thus using the “unruly woman” as framework allows the female characters to not be held in a binary. As noted in the introduction, by using binaristic feminist theory, we limit our analysis to whether a female character is either sexist or non-sexist and this is usually because we are investigating these characters as showing traits that are too masculine or overly feminine. Therefore, using the framework suggested here, we are able to highlight characters who have some the “unruly” aspects, even if we academically comment that there are still portions of their characterizations that could be sexist.

Elizabeth Hills noted that “limitations and consequences of discussing active heroines from within binaristic frameworks...position active female characters as phallic or ‘figuratively male’”. (40). This seems unfair to women themselves, to be continually compared to often hegemonic masculinity, which the “unruly woman” as frameworks actively avoids. The “unruly woman” is not positioned as “figuratively male” and allows for its positioning in not just femininity but a plurality of femininity. Mimi Schippers argues that allowing for multiple femininities (such as hegemonic/subordinate and others) gives more scope for seeing how portraying a certain kind of femininity can benefit men or the women themselves (95). And this I propose, is the crux of the “unruly woman” in that we should be analysing what a female character positively gains from using their ‘feminine wiles’. This “use” of their sexuality and femininity has become a problem for some academics when analysing film:

Feminist film theory will not readily dispel the ennui that now troubles it without engaging itself as fully in women’s laughter as it has in their tears, and without expanding its scope beyond the familiar terrain of melodrama and television soap opera to a wider range of cultural texts and the models of subjectivity they might suggest (Rowe, 5a).

This focus on negative aspects of femininity is found in video game scholarship with a bulk of research evaluating apparent harmful or sexist attitudes towards female body image via character design (Martin et al.; Kondrat; Dietz; Downs and Smith). Interestingly, many studies conducted on sexualisation in video games have been conducted using content analysis of image only. These are statistically relevant in that studies provide evidence to show that women are still woefully underrepresented when it comes to opportunities to play as a female; there is more opportunity to play as a non-human than a female character (Downs and Smith, 723). However, these analyses can lack nuance because they do not account for what the female characters are doing in the narrative. I propose that this can be more important when it comes to analysing whether these female characters are sexist stereotypes or not. Taking a character specifically identified by Rowe as the “unruly woman” character; if we were just to look at Miss Piggy through *just* content analysis, we would think her portrayal sexist due to her overly feminine dress sense, blonde flowing hair and large breasts. But, once you take into account what Miss Piggy says and does, we realise she is a strong female and feminist character.

The “unruly woman” as theoretical framework also negates another problem with some feminist analysis frameworks in that it subverts arguments on whether a text is ‘feminist enough’. Jaeyoon Park, drawing on Merri Lisa Johnson’s book *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane puts it in the box* (2007), discusses that “shifting from this focus.... transcend[s] such polarizing dichotomies of

positive/negative, progressive/backlash, and feminist/antifeminist representations” (Park, para 2). Therefore, the “unruly woman” framework argues that we think in a new way about how women make themselves visible. For Rowe:

We might examine models of *returning* the male gaze, exposing and making a spectacle of the gazer, claiming the pleasure and power of making spectacles of ourselves, and beginning to negate our own visibility in the public sphere. [original italics] (12a)

This framework then, advocates for female characterization to ‘re-appropriate’ what had previously been used as a negative representation. This justification is strengthened in Rowe’s newer volume *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen* (2011), especially when analysing women in popular culture:

Media icons as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Xena the Warrior Princess, and the Spice Girls challenge familiar representations of femininity by affirming female friendship, agency, and physical power. While my audiences were usually entertained by my examples, many could not see past the violence, overt sexuality, and commercialism in the chips I showed and were troubled by my argument (6b).

For Rowe, “failures to understand new models of femininity and feminism that in fact may be expressions of unruliness” (4b) has hindered the study of positive feminine representations. And that in fact “a cluster of attributes that challenge patriarchal power by defying norms of femininity intended to keep a woman in her place” (10b) is why what some would consider to be overly-sexualised video game characters should be addressed from an “unruly woman” framework. As I will analyse in relation to characters in *The Witcher 3*, choosing to be sexual or ‘attractive’ can actually create “disorder by dominating men” (10b). Utilizing work by Jennifer Higginbotham, she notes that some feminist framework would analyse female characters by “seeing a progression from ‘naturally’ bad femininity to ‘naturally’ good femininity, or from ‘constructed’ femininity to ‘natural’ femininity” (65). However, we need to stop using competing “models of femininity”. Schippers claims that this mindset leaves us with less conceptual room “to identify multiple femininities within race and class groups, and more importantly, which raced and classed femininities serve the interests of male dominance and which do not” (89).

Another reason as to why the “unruly woman” framework should be utilized when analysing female characters is because it is more appropriate and in-depth for video game analysis rather than The Bechdel test. This framework states that a work must pass three separate points to be considered feminist; 1) there must be two female characters, 2) they have one conversation and 3) their conversation is not about a man (Bechdel, 1985). Like content analysis, these points give a good starting point on how to begin analysing whether a narrative is sexist but the Bechdel test has been criticised for being overly-simplistic (O’Meara, 1120). Therefore, for the “unruly woman” framework here, the following must be considered as suggested by O’Meara to combat simplicity:

What do they discuss? When and where do they discuss it? How do they phrase it? How it is performed? are their words acknowledged, praised, or dismissed by other characters? are their words repeated by film-goers, and immortalized in lists of memorable dialogue? (O’Meara, 1121)

This creates a more comprehensive understanding of the characters and also a more “pluralistic” notion of female dialogue and also does not “reduce all female speech to a single set of norms” (1121). I have specifically chosen a video game for analysis because video games have typically been coded as male spaces. However, this is starting to change in quite a rapid way in terms of more women playing video games and so we should not still be reducing female video game characters down to simply being “hyper-sexualised”. This is especially because “games are an influential type of media, and the stories they tell have far reaching effects” (Lucas 10). I chose *The Witcher 3* for analyse in particular due to there being many female characters within the game franchise and the source material (books) which makes it rich for analysis. As well as this, early in 2020 when Netflix released their televised version of the books, it was lauded for featuring “incredibly strong women in significant roles” (Monique, np).

The game, which is my focus, is based on the novels of Andrzej Sapkowski whose main character Geralt is a monster hunter known in the series as a Witcher. Although Geralt is the titular character in the franchise, there are many female characters who appear frequently throughout the novels, sometimes with whole chapters devoted to them. Many of these women make appearances in *The Witcher 3* video game as well. The storyline of the base game is to find a young girl called Ciri who has gone missing while playing as Geralt. Although the player controls Geralt (and occasionally plays as Ciri) the female characters in the game can be just as important for moving the narrative along. For example, many of the game endings that the player may end up with are dependent on whether the player chooses positive or negative interactions with the female characters. Encounters with the important females sorceresses within the game such as Triss Merigold, Yennefer of Vengerburg, Keira Metz and Philippa Eilhart, present an interesting narrative and indeed feminist paradox. They are all conventionally attractive and at first glance just conform to characters created for the male gaze. However, using the “unruly woman” as framework, we can see that these women are much more than damsels in distress, and can be positive, feminist female representations.

Unruly Women in *The Witcher 3*

The seminal work which is often attributed to theorizing gendered stereotypes of violence in video games (and is consequent attribution to misogyny in real life) was produced by Dietz (1998). In this work they found that the “most popular ways of stereotyping females in video games is by creating female characters which are sexually provocative” (188). They also proclaimed that at the time characters were mostly damsels in distress rather than active characters (188). The focus on the body of these women characters continued in much work with researchers pointing to a link between video games “perpetuating an unrealistic ideal of thinness as attractive” (Martins et al. 824). Researchers also claimed that these ‘unrealistic’ and sexualised versions of women in games can affect social relationships stating that “if males are disappointed that women cannot achieve these proportions, this may hinder relational development” (Downs and Smith, 731). However, this kind of research is too reductive as it seems to portray all sexualisation of female characters as overwhelmingly negative.

Sexualisation of female characters can be portrayed as a positive through the “unruly woman”. When describing the character of Medusa, Rowe noted that “her sexuality is neither evil and uncontrollable like that of the femme fatale, nor sanctified and denied like that of the virgin/madonna.” (10–11a) and this can be applied to *The Witcher 3* narrative and characterizations. Many of the women in the game dress provocatively and in a way that would be considered conventionally attractively and Rowe describes this as “excessiveness” and “preening femininity” (27a). I propose here then, that the women within *Witcher 3* display a lot of their ‘excess’ in the way they display or ‘make visible’ their femininity with the way they dress. A part of this is due to canonical narrative; in *Time of Contempt* (Sapkowski, a), the sorceresses attending a banquet use their bodies, and the sexualization of their bodies, as a power play when dealing with other sorceresses and mages. A sorceress who appears in the game, Philippa Eilhart, alludes to the way in which the women are using their femininity to gain this political power in the game as well. This is a typical trope of the “unruly woman” and of O’Meara’s notes about the Bechdel test when it comes to performance and what is gained; these women are using their bodies as a performance to get what they desire rather than simply being part of the male gaze.

That is not to say that CD Projekt Red did not take some liberty with the state of undress with some female characters; Triss Merigold in the books wears high collars and covers her chest due to an injury suffered in a battle established in *Blood of Elves* (Sapowski, b) but wears a low cut top in the game. But, CD Projekt Red do address the issue of a stereotypical trope of women’s armour in an exchange between male character Vernon Roche and female character Ves. In some games it has been comically noticed that female ‘fighter’ characters are often put in armour that would not protect them at all. Characters such as Ivy in *Soul Calibur 2* wear armour that shows cleavage,

stomach, legs, and so they would be quickly dispatched if worn in real life combat. However, within a game cut-scene Vernon pointedly chides Ves for “running into battle without a breast plate” (CD Projekt Red). This brings a point of realism to the game which is not often seen in other video game offerings. Jansz and Martis have noted how the success of video game franchise based on Lara Croft has empowered female gamers in that “the female characters they are playing may look odd, but they are competent and occupy a powerful position in the virtual world of the video game.” (142). It is important to note that in the main quest line there are several instances where the player (as Geralt) has to rely on female characters or take their advice. One female character in particular who has prominent placement by the developers in the narrative is Cerys an Craite. CD Projekt Red developed this character as she does not appear in the books (although her brother Hjalmar does):

The character Cerys, Crach’s daughter, was designed from scratch for the purposes of this game. Called Sparrowhawk by some, this brave, strong-willed, and yet at the same time prudent young woman takes after her father more in manner than appearsin. (The Official Witcher Wikia-witcher.wikia.com)

Cerys’ character is clearly portrayed as the better choice for Geralt to choose when playing the quest ‘The King’s Gambit’. In this quest, banquet attendees have been slaughtered by Berserkers, lycanthropic men who turn into bears rather than wolves. The player is given two choices on how to finish this quest. The first is to choose Cerys, who will take a calm and collected approach to gathering evidence to whom is responsible. The second is to choose Hjalmar, who takes a more rash approach and rides off to confront a druid he thinks is responsible. Interestingly, if the player chooses Hjalmar they will not find out who organised the atrocity and the following passage will appear in their quest notebook:

Geralt tried to get the druid who conducted the ceremony to tell him who was responsible for the Kaer Trolde massacre. The druid refused to answer – and Hjalmar showed that it was vengeance more than testimony that interested him. He killed the druid, who took the knowledge of his patron’s identity with him to the grave. (CD Projekt Red)

Cerys not only proves to be the best option within this quest in that the player will find out who the organiser really was and sees them punished, but she will be crowned Queen and in the end credits of the game and it will be revealed that Skellige prospers under her reign. It makes sense in regards to canon for the established female characters (Triss, Yennefer, Philippa, etc.) to be powerful characters; many of the sorceresses were advisors to Kings and governments. What is interesting about the women of *Witcher 3* that have been made for the game is that they are not ‘stereotypical’ when it comes to female representation. Cerys an Craite was developed to be the better choice and has intellectual dominance over Hjalmar. This is similar to the way in which Rowe describes Miss Piggy: “This dominance over the apparent leader of the Muppets is central to Miss Piggy’s persona. It is also central to a larger tradition of female unruliness – that of the woman on top – which resonates in her image” (Rowe 26a).

And the “woman on top” is seen in the romance options within the game as well. For most players, their first encounter with romance option will come from a sorceress called Keira Metz who appears in previous games. In the quest ‘A Favour for a Friend’ there is an option to have sex with Keira. Interestingly, this interaction turns out to be a ruse for Keira to cast a sleeping spell on Geralt for her own benefit. This is not the last time in the game where a female character essentially lulls Geralt into a trap using sex as an incentive. What makes the portrayal of sex and sexuality interesting in *Witcher 3* and the women in these portrayals as the “unruly woman” is the consequences that the player faces if they try to romance two witches at the same time. During the gameplay, a player has the opportunity to tell both sorceresses Triss and Yennefer that they want to be with them. If the player tries to choose both these gaming options they will trigger a quest called ‘It Takes Three to Tango’. In this quest the player will have ended up with romance scenes with both women but this quest ends with

Geralt manacled to a bed with both women leaving. Ultimately, any further attempt to speak romantically to either Triss or Yennefer will let the player know that, in no uncertain terms, that Geralt will not be part of their life.

Studies mentioned previously in this article have noted how negative attitudes may be enforced by video games, but other studies have shown that the opposite can be true. Katsarov et al. argue that ‘scientific evidence shows that video games can have positive effects on the morality and prosocial competences of players’ (Katsarov et al. 2017; p. 2). Therefore, I propose that the fact that Triss and Yennefer will reject romance with Geralt entirely can instil moral virtues in the player. If the player tries to be with both of them (essentially cheat on them) this will reinforce to the player that this is wrong in real life too due to the bad in-game consequences; as Adams and Rembukkana note it “posits Triss and Yennefer’s offer not as a potential mutually satisfying sexual experience or romantic triad, but rather as a foolish dream of male access to multiple female romantic partners” (para 29).

Triss and Yennefer subvert the patriarchal concept of ‘standing by your man’ and become the “unruly women” because of this. Rowe describes “the essence of conventional femininity is the pursuit of heterosexual love” (27) and although romance is an option in *Witcher 3*, the female characters are not defined by it. These characters have a multitude of cutscenes where (taking notes from O’Meara), they discuss important details of world politics; how they can manipulate events to their own advantage; scenes that show that their words are often acknowledged and praised by other characters both male and female; and these are discussed in typically ‘masculine’ locations such as lodges and stately courts; and finally, there are many strong female characters who are represented without a man by their side. Furthermore, when playing as Ciri, the player has the option to state that they ‘prefer women’ in main questline ‘The Calm Before the Storm’. This is an important homage to canon, where Ciri has a lesbian relationship with bandit character Mistle (*Time of Contempt*- Sapkowski). This option means that the game is able to display progressive attitudes and makes Ciri, in this instance, the “unruly woman”, uninterested in “conventional heterosexual love”.

However, some commentators had issue with certain aspects of the game in regards to Ciri in other ways. In May 2015 the Feminist Frequency Twitter account took issue with the fact that when you play as Ciri within the game insults become “gendered” in that enemies can be heard calling her a whore. The Feminist Frequency account stated that in a fantasy game these insults were inappropriate; “Also, the “it’s realistic for enemies to sexually harass female characters” excuse is nonsense in fantasy games filled with ghouls & wraiths” (Feminist Frequency). I would disagree however, and this disagreement is in turn important to how analysis of feminist elements in video games, especially *Witcher 3*, should be approached. Because, a true feminist portrayal woman in video games should not be held in a binary and although I have resisted only focusing on negative aspects in this article, these are inherently a realistic part of many women’s life around the world. As well as this, the male playable character is Geralt is “constantly confronted with discriminatory comments by non-player characters who call Geralt a ‘mutant’ or a ‘freak’ and makes it clear that as a *Witcher* he counts as less than human” (Ostritsch 123). Slurs and insults are levied at both male and female characters and so is not only used for the character of Ciri. Furthermore, for Ostritsch, this is where some critics are confusing representation as endorsement:

I believe that the insults that Geralt faces can be said to have a morally condemnable, incorrigible social meaning... Does this in itself make *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED 2015) a game that endorses discrimination and/or racism? Such an allegation seems very farfetched, because even though discrimination and racism are part of the fictional world of *The Witcher 3*, it is clearly not embraced by the main protagonist Geralt of Rivia (123).

The world of *Witcher* is inherently discriminatory, not just when it comes to women. For Feminist Frequency to claim it is not realistic in the context of a ‘fantasy game’ misses the mark, as the games are based on a world where sexism is present. For Hye-Won “as a popular narrative medium, video games feature female heroes to represent gender values of the time” (Hye-Won 27). So, is it not then

realistic that Ciri, although being a powerful and the “unruly woman”, would not still suffer from sexism, especially in a medieval world setting? For Rowe, the unruly woman’s visibility draws attention to the fact that the female character breaks the norms of the patriarchy. A reading of *Witcher 3* then that the sexism experienced by Ciri should then be expected of the non-playable characters who shout these gendered slurs. Ciri is not a simpering damsel in distress and the very point is that Ciri proves herself to be a far superior combatant to these attackers and she can cut down all those who use gendered slurs against her.

CD Projekt Red wrote the narrative of the main questline to test the players morals and, interestingly, if they choose to make choices which make Ciri into a ‘damsel in distress character’ rather than the “unruly woman”, they will end up with arguably a worse ending for her. Katsarov et al. note that ethical challenges for players include prosocial, negotiation, and direct consequences (8–14). The main game ending involves Geralt sending Ciri into another dimension to fight an entity known as the White Frost. At this flash-point there are several endings; Ciri may die; Ciri defeats the White Frost and returns to the world and becomes a Witcher herself; or Ciri defeats the White Frost and returns to the world and becomes an empress. To get an ending where Ciri doesn’t die, the player must not cause her to doubt herself and these actions can happen hours before the end of the game meaning they cannot be changed on a whim. If the player treats Ciri in a sexist way like telling her to ‘calm down’ when she loses her temper in quest ‘The Child of the Elder Blood’, or telling her to ‘Relax, you don’t have to be good at everything’ during the quest ‘Blood on the Battlefield’, or accompanying her to a meeting with the sorceresses rather than trusting her to go alone in quest ‘Final Preparations’, Ciri will die and in turn Geralt is alluded to kill himself via combat (vg247.com). I argue then that players are taught their sexism in this game will lead to a worse ending, and if we are to believe from studies that players can learn misogyny from video games, then I can argue that *Witcher 3* teaches them the negative consequences of this.

Conclusion

The video game industry has moved so fast in recent years, and has had a major push for more women within gaming and in development and in the last few years there has been massive critical success with games such as *The Last of Us* franchise (2013, 2020), (*Horizon Zero Dawn* (2017), the Lara Croft video game reboot in 2013 heavily involve female main characters. That is not to say that there is not a long way to go. I concede that “culturally, the gaming industry, gaming communities, and the content of video games reflect an adherence to heteronormative, white, and patriarchal societal norms, which require women and minorities to be marginalized” (Lucas 16).

However, although the women in the *Witcher 3* conform to standards of beauty which may seem to draw them away from the “unruly woman” description their behaviours as active characters draws them back into this theoretical realm. The Sorceresses in particular, live to excess and in both the game and canonically in Sapkowski’s novels are famous for their dry humour and quick wits. By using the “unruly woman” as framework we are able to analyse the fact that these women are “laying a claim” to their own desire and in essence are revisiting the male gaze in a subverted manner as suggested by Rowe. Importantly, although Geralt was the playable character in the *Witcher 3*, CD Projekt Red make it clear in the final main quest mission that the game was never really about him at all, it was about Ciri. Before Ciri enters a portal to battle the White Frost she turns to Geralt and says with a caring laugh, “What can you know about saving the world silly? You are but a Witcher. This is my story, not yours, you must let me finish telling it” (CD Projekt Red, 2015). Although the game can be criticised for appearing to over-sexualise the women it cannot be denied that within the narrative, women are seen as powerful and unruly.

That is not to say that the *Witcher 3* does not show an important part of Rowe’s unruly woman in that “The unruly woman’s power is fragile and subject to social and generic forces” (12b). As there are some incidents of sexism within the game but through the “unruly woman” as theoretical frame-

work I can advise that *Witcher 3* gives many good representations of the unruly woman, and thus some believable and positive representations of female characters in video games.

By using the “unruly woman” as theoretical framework we are able to resist analysing video games in a simple sexist/non-sexist binary or deciding to declare certain video games as “feminist” enough. This is especially important with representations of sexuality and how women ‘use’ their sexuality because often declaring a female character as “too slutty” is patriarchal itself as it assumes that women should have their sex and sexuality decided by what is “socially acceptable” which of course is often dictated by cis-hetero men (Petersen).

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The Discourse of Desire in the Construction of Identity: A Study of Harold Pinter's Ruth in *The Homecoming*

ALANKAR DAS DALAL

Abstract: One of the constant premises in the plays of Harold Pinter, throughout his literary career, is the struggle for dominance and subordination in the construction of identity, between the male and the female characters. This strife is not merely confined to the subjective establishment of authority within the family structure but also entails an expression of their sexual selves in their familial relationships as well as outside the domestic sphere. Consequently the issue of power needs to be analysed in relation to the issue of sexuality. This chapter shall explore the wife-whore paradigm of the female characters in the middle and later phase of Pinter's dramatic career where the women emerge out of their disguised selves, unlike Meg in *The Birthday Party* or Rose in *The Room*, and combat the battle more blatantly and with a brazen demeanour. Though the psychoanalytic theories of 'castration complex' and 'penis envy', as propounded by Freud, view women as inherently subservient to men, Ruth in *The Homecoming* showcases how a woman capitalises upon sex to reverse this power equation, thereby, transcending the limitations of the Freudian boundaries. It is this emancipation that, I argue, can be interpreted in the light of the Lacanian phallus.

Keywords: desire, phallus, identity, power

Talking about the origin of Oedipus complex in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess on October 15, 1897, Freud states,

I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early in children who have been made hysterical. (Similar to the invention of parentage [family romance] in paranoia – heroes, founders of religion) – If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objections that reason raises against the presupposition of fate; and we can understand why the later 'drama of fate' was bound to fail so miserably. (qtd. in Storr 33)

Freud's theory further explains that during the stages of growth, the infant boy develops sexual inclination towards his mother, desires to win her absolute possession and unwittingly fosters hostile sentiments for his father. The incestuous drives for the mother and the bitter resentment for the father posit the boy into a conflict with his parents and he views the dominant rival as an inescapable threat. His fears revolve around the apprehension that the father may harm his genital organs since they are the source of his lustful feelings. Freud calls this 'castration anxiety' which induces repression of the desire for the mother, ushers the child into latency period and enables him to identify with the father (Hall et al. 55). However, in the case of a girl, when she realizes that she is already castrated, she blames her mother for depriving her of the penis and directs her libidinal feelings towards the father. According to Freud, it is in this deprivation of the penis that the powerlessness of the females is rooted. However, Lacan does not fully agree with this notion of Freud. In *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian*

Psychoanalysis, Dylan Evans observes, “castration is defined by Lacan as a symbolic lack of an imaginary object; castration does not bear on the penis as a real organ, but on the imaginary phallus” (23).

Here, two significant domains of the definition that draw our attention are ‘lack’ and ‘phallus’. Since Lacan speaks of this ‘lack’ not as that of the male physical organ but as “a symbolic lack”, I contend that it is not just the females who experience this ‘lack’ but the males as well. This calls to mind Karen Horney’s theory of ‘womb envy’ according to which men’s bodies lack the child bearing capacity with which females are endowed giving rise to feelings of jealousy among males. While Freud endorses that it is the woman who suffers from this ‘lack’, I argue that in the plays of Pinter it is the men who undergo this suffering in Lacanian terms. In *The Homecoming* Max lacks a wife, since Jessie is dead, his sons lack a mother and the whole house lacks a female figure. Consequently the arrival of Ruth arouses the desire of all the starving males as it promises a possible fulfillment of their lacks. Though it is doubtful whether, by the end of the play, this goal is achieved or not, Teddy is undoubtedly victimized as he is perpetually left lacking a wife.

The ‘phallus’, in Freudian sense, is homologous to the male sexual organ, the penis. However, Lacan prefers to differ. In *Jacques Lacan* Sean Homer mentions, “The phallus in Lacanian theory should not be confused with the male genital organ although it clearly carries these connotations. The phallus is first and foremost a signifier and in Lacan’s system a particularly privileged signifier” (54). It is my contention that Pinter’s women characters can be viewed from both the aspects of Lacan’s notion of the phallus, that is, the imaginary and the symbolic. In the process of psychosexual development, the child gradually realizes that it is not the only object of the mother’s desire and her desire seeks fulfillment not just with the child but elsewhere.

The simple dyadic relationship between the mother and child is thus turned into a triangular relationship between the child, the mother and the object of her desire. The child attempts to seduce the mother by becoming that object of desire. Lacan calls this third term the imaginary phallus. (55)

Therefore, the intervention of the father leads to a schism in the imaginary unity between the mother and the child. This father, however, is not the actual father but, what Lacan calls, the Name-of-the-Father that plays a symbolic function. It is this symbolic phallus that assumes a position of authority in the child’s perception. In Pinter’s plays, it is in the depiction of being the object of desire and acquiring the position of power that the women become the Lacanian phallus. Thus, the female characters here substitute the Name-of-the-Father for it is a signifier signifying the seat of dominance as, according to Lacan, “masculinity involves the posture or pretence of having the phallus, while femininity involves the *masquerade* of being the phallus” (95). Masculinity and femininity, for Lacan, are not biological essences but symbolic positions, and it is fundamentally by assuming femininity that the women construct their identity.

In the 1960s the plays of Harold Pinter exhibit a shift in focus from the ‘room’ and the intrusion of the outsider to how the characters realign their positions in the most intimate of battlefields, that is the family and within the most intimate of relationships, that is marriage. The search for identity, the exploration of sexuality and the dialectic of male–female relationships become the central emphasis. The dualism in the depiction of the women as against the vulnerability and inadequacies of the men achieves greater prominence in the works of this period. Pinter becomes obsessively occupied with the understanding of feminine psyche and, thus, embarks on a journey where he endeavours to question, analyse and dissect feminine problems with an intention to trace a woman’s growth to self-discovery and self-realisation. His preoccupation with feminine duality can be traced back to his early works in the roles of Meg and Lulu in *The Birthday Party* and Mrs. Stokes and the Girl in *A Night Out*. However, the fragmented feminine selves of the wife and the whore which were shown in separate portrayals find an integrated depiction in the characters of Flora in *A Slight Ache*, Stella in *The Collection*, Sarah in *The Lover*, Ruth in *The Homecoming* and Emma in *Betrayal*. The dichotomy of the female image in the sacredness of venerable wives and the profanity of lustful whores has been most explicitly articulated by Richard in *The Lover*,

[...] I wasn't looking for your double, was I? I wasn't looking for a woman I could respect, as you, whom I could admire and love, as I do you. Was I? All I wanted was ... how shall I put it ... someone who could express and engender lust with all lust's cunning. Nothing more. (*Plays* 2, 136)

Sarah, therefore, plays the role of the mistress that combines the traits of both the wife and the whore. In the early plays of this period, Elizabeth Sakellaridou observes in *Pinter's Female Portraits*, the heroines "fight the mutilation of their discourse and the conditioning of their behaviour" that is finally metamorphosed in "Ruth's triumphant self-declaration as a complete and autonomous human being in *The Homecoming*" (72). In this sense, Ruth reflects the strength of Sally in *Night School* which, Billington believes, "deals with women's desire for unclaimed independence and the power of choice over how they live" (137). Ruth exactly establishes herself on these grounds, capitalizing not only upon the crises of the male members of the family but also upon her sexuality.

Ruth is the wife of the intellectual Teddy who brings her to his home in North London after six years of their married life in America. The arrival of Ruth triggers a series of repressed desires among the members of the household who vie with each other for her. It is when Ruth realizes what they lack she initiates her control over them and paves the path for her own liberation. She exploits the lacuna created as a result of Jessie's death to carve a niche in the family.

Ruth exudes an unquestionable aura of superiority since the time of her arrival at night. Her silent manoeuvre round the house, punctuated by occasional utterances, does not indicate her discomfort being at a new locale but subtly insinuates her close surveillance of the house she is destined to govern. This is further implied when she wishes to go out for a stroll and no amount of coaxing from Teddy convinces her to stay back. It is similar to the manner in which the predator surveys the arena prior to victimizing its prey; and in this human jungle Ruth turns out to be the leader of the pack. This rising to authority is tacitly hinted when Teddy hands over the keys of the house to Ruth before she leaves for a walk. Thereafter, she emerges with an indomitable spirit in her first encounter with Lenny. That she will not be subservient to male domination is suggested in her first words to Lenny where opposing his greeting of "Good evening", she says, "Morning, I think" (*Plays* 3 23). Later, when Lenny proposes to hold her hand, her non-compliance shows that her will is a hard nut to crack. As the power game continues further, it reaches a climactic moment when Lenny decides to take the glass away from Ruth.

RUTH. I haven't quite finished.

LENNY. You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.

RUTH. No, I haven't.

LENNY. Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.

RUTH. Not in mine, Leonard

[...]

LENNY. Just give me the glass.

RUTH. No.

Pause.

LENNY. I'll take it, then.

RUTH. If you take the glass ... I'll take you.

Pause.

LENNY. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?

RUTH. Why don't I just take you?

Pause.

LENNY. You're joking. (*Plays* 3, 25-26)

The three pauses here, all before Lenny's responses, unmistakably reveal how deeply he is thwarted by Ruth's words and actions. It not only exasperates him but also exposes his deep-seated unconscious fears. Thereafter, when she insists him to recline on her lap while she will pour the water down his throat, Ruth regresses him into infantile debility while finalizing her victory in the battle of wills. In this episode, Billington points out, the ruthless Ruth "challenges him on two fronts: as a sexy woman

and surrogate mother" (173). In 'The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women as Viewed by Men and by Women', Karen Horney states, "The only thing in which she [a woman] ultimately has the advantage over the man is the, surely very questionable, pleasure in the act of birth" and later adds, "woman has in motherhood, or in the capacity of motherhood, a quite indisputable and by no means negligible physiological superiority" (60). It is along this ground that Ruth initiates her authority in the family that lacks a mother figure.

It is undeniable that the central emphasis of *The Homecoming* is the character of Ruth. Her actions and words set in motion all that have hitherto been unattended, undiscovered and unrealized. In this context, Lenny's first encounter with Ruth draws significant attention. In the opening scene of the play, he appears to be quite a dominating individual, combating his father's tirades strongly and calling him either a "daft prat" or a "stupid sod". When he confronts Ruth, he retains that domineering demeanour which unfortunately is annihilated by the latter. Though he attempts to establish his authority upon her by narrating his past encounters with women where he had been oppressive, Ruth remains unmoved and unaffected. His towering self-assertion is thoroughly shattered into smithereens and he is so completely defeated that after Ruth departs when Max enters the scene, Lenny desperately seeks solitude, insisting his father repeatedly to leave him alone. His recounting of his past experiences with the two women fails to destabilize Ruth because she does not fear castration in the Freudian sense but this failure deeply unsettles and unnerves Lenny because it exposes his infantile fears and castration anxiety, which Billington calls, "macho posturing and mother-fixation" (172). Thus, the hunter becomes the hunted. Consequently his attitude towards Ruth completely changes when he meets her next. He is so deeply disturbed by her presence that when she chooses to respond to his philosophical questions to Teddy, Lenny prefers not only to remain silent but leaves the stage immediately with his father.

Ruth, by being the object of Lenny's desire, also unleashes his jealousy for Teddy. Speaking about infantile jealousy in Book 1, Chapter 7 of *Confessions*, St. Augustine says, "I saw with my own eyes, and I observed carefully, a young child devoured by jealousy: he was not yet able to speak, yet he could not prevent himself from going pale at the bitter spectacle of his brother at the breast" (qtd. in *Family Complexes* 24). Lenny could never enjoy the undivided love of his mother for she harboured greater affections for Teddy. He had, thus, always been envious of his brother. Jacques Lacan in *Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual* states, "jealousy can still manifest itself long after the subject has been weaned and is no longer in a situation of vital competition with his brother" (27). The infantile jealousy of Lenny is aroused by Ruth when she integrates into the family both as a wife and as a mother. This jealousy is implicitly suggested in his first meeting with Ruth when he proposes to remove the ashtray out of her way. An ashtray is a receptacle for burned-out cigarette stubs. In psychoanalytic terms, while a cigarette is an unmistakable phallic symbol, a burned-out cigarette would imply impotence. Thus, Gabbard observes, "Lenny has suggested that he get rid of the impotent male who lives at her side" (191). Later again it is out of jealousy that he attempts to corner Teddy by asking intellectual questions outside the latter's domain of study. In Ruth's presence it becomes a disguised effort to prove Teddy's unworthiness and thereby displace him from the position Lenny covets. It is only when she becomes, as Martin Esslin puts it, "available to them as a sexual partner" that Lenny strips off all his disguise and blatantly proposes to dance with Ruth (*Playwright* 159). Therefore, in the Introduction to *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays* Arthur Ganz rightly states, "Her position as a desired sexual object gives Ruth ... her triumphant status at the end of the play" (qtd. in Gabbard 185).

In 'From Myth and Archetype to Reality: Integration of the Female Image' Elizabeth Sakellariidou says, "Ruth achieves what previous Pinter female characters failed to achieve. She breaks through at the point where Flora was stopped midway, where Stella was turned mute, where Sarah gave unfinished or negative definitions" (109). It is in this stance Ruth challenges the female boundaries. For her, her body is the weapon to establish her authority over the others. She even states that she had been a photographic model for the body before marrying Teddy. The truth of this assertion, how-

ever, is unverifiable. It is quite possible that to build her present dominance she is falsely inventing the past, as A. R. Braunmuller in 'Harold Pinter: the Metamorphosis of Memory' observes, "Ruth has the ability not only to form the future but also to reconstruct the past according to her wishes" (qtd. in Sakellaridou 114). Yet, what becomes obvious from her musings is that her conjugal life in America has not been one of bliss and felicity – "It's all rock. And sand. It stretches ... so far ... everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there" (*Plays* 336). There is an inevitable sense of Eliotesque gloom in her words, symptomatic of the sterility that her marital life has reached. Coming to Teddy's house, she feels more at-home and given a chance to stay back, she does not let this opportunity slip by. Talking about her decision to abandon her children and husband, Pinter says, "If this had been a happy marriage it wouldn't have happened" (qtd. in Prentice 135).

It is in the role of a seducer, Ruth evokes the latent desires and repressed libidinal drives of the male members of the family, capitalizing upon which she thrives among these horde of savages. When Lenny indulges in a philosophical discourse with Teddy about the known and the unknown, about being and non-being, Ruth demeans the seriousness of the conversation from the metaphysical to the physical by drawing Lenny's attention towards her body.

Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict ... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind. (*Plays* 3, 35)

That she becomes the centre of their desire is indisputable as Max, who had previously regarded her as "a smelly scrubber" and "a stinking pox-ridden slut", now views her as "a lovely girl" and a "beautiful woman". It is by choosing to be the object of their desire that Ruth becomes the Lacanian phallus. Lacan views the phallus not as the penis but as a signifier that constitutes the imaginary object of the mother's desire. In *Ecrits: A Selection* Lacan states, "If the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire" (221). Ruth in the play identifies the lack of the family that constitutes their sexual longings which she utilizes to her advantage. It is by adopting the role of the whore that she becomes accessible to them. Lacan further says, "I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved" (221). This rejection in Ruth is discernible in her decision not to return to her children and husband, thereby giving up the role of the mother and the wife. However, whether she metamorphoses into a tart or not remains an irresolvable question for she wishes to be desired, in Lacanian terms, 'for that which she is not'.

The character of Ruth has raised quite a lot of controversies among the critics as she is denounced as a lustful woman, even a nymphomaniac, who chooses to become a prostitute. She not only agrees to dance with her brother-in-law, Lenny and ends up kissing him passionately but she also, a little later, rolls on the floor with Joey embracing and kissing him. Thereafter, she spends two complete hours with Joey in the bedroom upstairs, inevitably implying her transformation to a whore. This is explicitly evident in Teddy's proposal to his wife – "Ruth ... the family have invited you to stay, for a little while longer. As a ... as a kind of guest" – and her silent acceptance (*Plays* 347). However, what is to be noted here is that she agrees to such an offer because that will grant her centrality in the family, she will be able to manipulate others according to her wishes. Rejecting Esslin and Quigley's opinion, Pinter himself asserts, "She does not become a harlot," and points out, "At the end of the play she is in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain she will go off to Greek Street" (qtd. in Prentice 127). This freedom enables Ruth to acquire a strong will and a form of sexual authority which is hinted in the subtle apprehensions of Max.

But there's something worrying me. Perhaps she's not so up to the mark. Eh? Teddy, you're the best judge. Do you think she'd be up to the mark?

Pause.

I mean what about all this teasing? Is she going to make a habit of it? That'll get us nowhere. (*Plays* 3, 46)

These practical fears of Max unavoidably reveal not only how much Ruth shall be empowered once she is assimilated into the 'bosom of the family' but also his jealousy of the woman who might marginalize him further in the family.

Once her position is finalized, Ruth asserts absolute authority over the family "as a quasi-matriarch", in the words of Mark Taylor-Batty (93). Towards the end of the play she reduces the inmates of the house to sketchy effigies craving her favours helplessly. This grants Ruth with the power to control them as per her demands. In *Gender and Discourse* Deborah Tannen observes Roger Brown and Albert Gilman's definition of power,

One person may be said to have power over another to the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other. Power is a relationship between atleast two persons, and it is non-reciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior. (25-26)

Though the family decides the fate of Ruth, her plan of action in the future and her role as a wife-whore, she does not let that happen according to their terms. Her ascension to a powerful position in the family is unmistakable when she authoritatively demands for food and drink, and later dictates the conditions of living. She speaks with determination and self-confidence. Bernard Dukore points out that she bargains calmly because "The power is hers, for no one else has the supply and everyone else has the demand" (Pinter 80). Her dominance portrays her as "a businesswoman", says Elizabeth Sakellaridou, who "exhibits surprising ability for negotiation, a thorough knowledge of the process of financial transactions and a mastery of legal terminology" (113). Thus, Ruth adopts a very paternal identity. It is in this sense that she becomes the symbolic phallus in Lacanian terms. In *Écrits: A Selection* Lacan observes, "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (qtd. in Evans 122). In the last act Ruth plays the legislative function by setting the laws of her stay. She can, therefore, be associated with the Name-of-the-Father in the prohibitive function of the symbolic father. Lacan often plays on the homophony of *le nom du père* (the Name-of-the-father) and *le 'non' du père* (the 'no' of the father). Ruth can also be equated with the latter as she does not acquiesce to the others without a fight. Her first word in the play is a 'No' and she uses this as many as six times in the next three pages. Thereafter, this becomes more prominent when she disagrees with Teddy to return to America, denies Lenny the glass and refuses Joey to 'go the whole hog'. Thus, she attains, in Pinter's words, "a kind of freedom" which is derived from, as Penelope Prentice observes, "having nothing more to lose" (134). It is this freedom that empowers Ruth and makes Max apprehensive.

MAX. I don't think she's got it clear.

Pause.

You understand what I mean? Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet?

Pause.

She won't ... be adaptable! (*Plays* 3, 50)

Despite being the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, Ruth does not restrict the incest taboo, rather she indulges in it quite blatantly, thereby transcending into the primal father of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* who is believed to be beyond the law. Thus, Andrew Wylie in *Sex on Stage: Gender and Sexuality in Post-War British Theatre* rightly states, "Gradually, attempts by the men to dominate Ruth are turned by her to her advantage, and she emerges as probably the most powerful figure in the play" (73-74).

Thus, Ruth's character exposes the innate vulnerability of the all-male family. This exposure in turn allows her not only to escape the aridity of her marriage and the loveless milieu of America but also to bring about her social, sexual and financial emancipation. With marvelous skill and compe-

tence, she participates in the power struggle that operates in the family and emerges victorious by homogenizing the opposing polarities of the Madonna and the tart, the mother and the whore. Billington's estimation, therefore, is worth noting,

In Ruth, Pinter gives us not an empty cipher or a blank theatrical device, but a positive, strong-willed woman who both exposes phallogocentric vanity and achieves the necessary dramatic feat of disrupting the power-structure and changing the situation. (178)

Ironically, though the play is "a feminist challenge to male despotism", Ruth ultimately becomes the phallic mother (168).

What Billington says about Pinter's cinematic adaptation of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Wife* – "Women progress and profit from the past; men remain insecure and exploitative" – is also applicable to *The Homecoming* (274). This struggle for power, control and authority is what defines Pinter's characters and beneath this struggle lies, in the words of Penelope Prentice, "an attempt to assert identity in order to gain attention, admiration, love" (137). This chapter has, thus, explored the intricate connections between desire and power in the construction of identity within the family structure. Starting with the Freudian notions, it shows the limitations within which Pinter's heroines do not remain confined, challenging the boundaries of feminine roles. Thus, it takes up the Lacanian principles of the phallus to explicate how the female characters acquire liberation not by 'having' but by 'being' the phallus which Lacan asserts in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* as "nothing more than a signifier" (314). In *The Homecoming* we have Ruth who withdraws from conventional marriage, for succumbing in it would subject her either to an arid sexual life or to the husband's dominance. Ruth, therefore, finds herself emancipated from the bonds of motherhood and wifedom by leaving her husband like Flora in *A Slight Ache* and envisaging a possibility of wish-fulfillment like Sarah in *The Lover*.

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The Romantic Perception of the Presence of God in *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: A Comparative Reading

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Abstract: *Robinson Crusoe* is written by Daniel Defoe, a writer often described as the father of English novel. This novel was first published in 1719, which means that it is the product of the age of reason and the neoclassical age. On the other hand, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the pioneers of the Romantic Movement in English poetry. “The Rime” was first published in 1798 in the collection, “Lyrical Ballads,” in collaboration with his friend and pioneer of romantic poetry, William Wordsworth.

Though *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime” belong to two different literary genres, namely novel and poetry, both are narratives that concern two protagonists who go on journeys that lead them to acquire new experiences that affect their future lives. Robinson and the mariner come to have journeys in the sea that finally land them into the full perception of God among all features of nature, which, according to romantics, is one of the principal agents that lead to man’s regaining of his innocence and purity.

The journeys that the two protagonists go through enforce isolation on them, which leads them to undergo an individual experience of suffering that ends the moment both come to perceive the presence of God, a perception that enables them to regain their peace and their faith.

This study is to undertake a comparative reading of the two works to highlight the experience of the two protagonists, which ends up with their full perception of the presence of God in the embrace of nature.

Keywords: comparative reading, nature, presence of God, romantic perception

1. Introduction

This paper aspires to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to underscore the experiences of the protagonists of the two works, which end up with their perception of the presence of God whether they are aware of Him or not.

As far as I know, only two studies deal with *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” in a comparative way. There are indeed many articles that undertake studies on the two works, but they deal with them on an individual basis without comparing them. The two studies are an article entitled “Mixed Messages: Isolation, Salvation, and Slavery in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” by Rami Blair and a book entitled *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* by Patrick J. Keane (1994).

Concerning Blair’s study, there are no publishing data; it is published on Academia with no information about the publisher and the year of publication¹. Anyway, it could have been published before 2010. As is apparent from the title of Blair’s article, the main focus of the study is on isolation, salvation and slavery in both works. Also, it is concerned “about providence and the nature of God” (1). Blair’s article is interested in dealing with slavery in general and “ideological slavery” (2, 3) in particular in *Robinson* and “metaphoric slavery” in “The Rime” (5), a point that I am not concerned

about treating in this paper. As for his reference to Robinson's "sin" and his argument about Robinson's need for "salvation" (3, 4), whether physical or spiritual, he is accurate. He also deals with the mariner's crime and the punishment he suffers (5), which he sees that it is "inappropriate for the crime" (6).

Regarding the punishment imposed on the other mariners, for Blair, it "seems unusually severe" (6). Still, the vital question is: do they deserve punishment or not? For me, at least, the clear and direct answer is that they deserve punishment since their crime cannot be justified. Finally, for Blair, the island and the sea are places where Robinson and the mariner suffer punishment. However, for me, besides, they are places that represent nature where they become able to perceive the presence of God.

Keane's book, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe*, mainly focuses on Coleridge's politics as the main title shows. The subtitle is a little bit misleading since it gives the wrong impression that it is going to undertake a comparative study of "The Rime" and *Robinson*. Raimonda Modiano argues that in this book Keane "proposes a political reading of *The Ancient Mariner*" (1996 450). That is why, in his book, Keane traces Coleridge's political views that he has embraced in the years preceding the writing of "The Rime." He presents all these political views, especially those concerning slavery and the slave trade, in the book's introduction. He imposes a "political reading" on the poem, to the extent that he unawarely forgets that the poem is a "work of 'pure imagination'" (Modiano 450). What leads Keane to deal with *Robinson* is that Coleridge in his "marginalia to *Robinson Crusoe*" (1830) in which he annotates *Robinson* and describes "its hero as a 'Universal Man' with whom every reader could identify" (Modiano 450; See also Simon Frost's study that partly deals with Coleridge's views regarding Robinson and the novel 2013 85–110). It enraged Keane that though Coleridge was an "abolitionist" and was against "slave trade" he neither criticized nor made any "mention of Crusoe's slave trading activities or his objectionable treatment of Friday" (Modiano 450; See also David P. Haney's review of Keane's book in which he pronounces similar views of this book 1995 498–501). After that Keane, though heavily relying on historical and biographical facts, offers a "political reading of *The Ancient Mariner* that does not jeopardize its status as a work of 'pure imagination'" (Modiano 452).

Other reviewers of Keane's book sound, though with some variation, similar views on it. Daniel P. Watkins claims that Keane's study is "an important contribution to the ongoing historicist assessment of Romanticism." Still, he accurately maintains that "while the subtitle suggests that Defoe's novel is central to the thesis, Keane's real interest is in Coleridge's work and thought at two different periods of his life" (1995 259) – the period after the French Revolution and the period in which he annotated a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. Another reviewer, Anya Taylor, argues that Keane's book "presents a comprehensive account of both the history of the slave trade and of twentieth-century political criticism about Coleridge" (1995 194). She also highlights the fact that the book is mainly a political reading of "The Rime" and refers to Keane's criticism of Coleridge concerning his silence about the slave trade in *Robinson*. Another reviewer of the book, Irving N. Rothman, states that Keane finds that both "The Rime" and *Robinson* "covertly treat the effect of slavery and the slave trade on the nation's sensibility" (1996 260), and argues that Keane's book "is a study of the political implications of the two major works, it is not an analysis of the aesthetics of literary production" (1996 261). Rothman, opposed to Keane's viewpoint, concludes that, by studying Defoe's novel and his essays on the slave trade, "we realize that Crusoe's greatest achievement in the book would be his conversion of Friday – saving souls, even his own; this is the crucial issue, not the slave trade *per se*" (1996 262).

In this way, one observes that these two studies engage each other in issues that this present study is not interested in handling in detail. Both studies focus on slavery and the slave trade. Blair's article attempts a comparative study of the two works. However, Keane's book is not a real comparative study of "The Rime" and *Robinson*; most reviewers conclude that it is a political reading of "The Rime" concerned about the issues of slavery and the slave trade. What leads Keane to deal with *Robinson* is that Coleridge ignored mentioning and criticizing Robinson's activities that relate to slavery and the slave trade. Here emerges the importance of the present study since it is going to deal

with the two works as works of pure imagination and since it is an attempt to attract attention to the fact that they are comparable on this basis.

This study is to fall into six sections: the first one is an introduction; the second deals with the guilt committed by the two protagonists; the third treats the punishment that befalls the two protagonists and which leads them to suspicion and later on to repentance; the fourth with the protagonists' perception of God and their reconciliation to themselves and God; the fifth with tolerance; and finally the sixth is a conclusion that sums up what has been done in the paper.

Robinson Crusoe (1719) by Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) are two of the masterpieces of world literature that cannot be ignored by anyone who comes to study English literature. Both *Robinson* and “The Rime” have achieved great popularity among readers and critics alike from the moment they were first published. Though they belong to two different literary genres and two different literary ages – *Robinson* is a novel that was written in the age of reason and in fact ushered in the English novel, and “The Rime” is a narrative poem, a ballad, that was created in the Romantic age and one of the poems that announced the advent of the Romantic Movement – they have a lot in common.

Both *Robinson* and “The Rime” are narratives of two protagonists who go through various experiences, mainly in the sea, that come to determine their future lives; each focuses on the individual experiences of its protagonist. Robinson and the mariner come to have journeys into the sea that finally land them into the full perception of God among all elements of nature, which, according to the romantics, is one of the principal agents that lead to man's regaining his innocence and purity.

Each of the two journeys begins with committing a sin, in the case of Robinson, and a crime, in the case of the mariner. Due to the sin/crime, they commit, they come to suffer punishment, and isolation and solitude are enforced on them. Then, they go through a process of atonement and penance for the sin/crime they committed. Both survive their suffering and are finally relieved of their sin/crime once they perceive that God was, and is always, there watching on them. This perception, which takes place in the embrace of nature, saves them physically and spiritually, enabling them to regain their peace and their faith.

This paper aims to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson* and “The Rime” to highlight the individual experiences of the protagonists of the two works, to underline the sin/crime committed by each of them, to underscore the punishment they suffer and the curse imposed on them, which leads them to suspect that God is not there watching on them, and finally to emphasize the fact they come to perceive that God is always there watching over them, which brings about their salvation and deliverance. Furthermore, the paper is to highlight the feeling of tolerance that prevails by the end of the two works. *Robinson* and “The Rime” are two of the important literary works that have come to occupy a very significant stance in world literature because of the tolerance, especially the “toleration of religious differences” (Cooney 2007 198), as well as the acceptance of the other that is embraced in the texts of the two works and that mainly prevails by their end, as will be shown.

2. The Guilt: Sin or Crime

According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, guilt is “the fact of having committed a specified or implied offence or crime” (1999 817). If you have a feeling that you are responsible for doing something bad or wrong, it means that you are guilty of committing a sin or a crime. Sins are done against God, while crimes are done against creatures created by God. In *Robinson*, Robinson commits an offence against his parents by disobeying them, which amounts to an offence against God, i.e. a sin. On the other hand, in “The Rime,” the ancient mariner commits a crime when he kills the Albatross, an innocent seabird, which disrupts the order of nature and its tranquillity, and that is why some critics consider the mariner's crime a sin; Bowra deems “The Rime” “a tale of crime and punishment” and “a myth of guilt and redemption” about “a guilty soul” (1950 68, 71); Weng sees it “as a narrative of sin and redemption” “centred on the individual soul and moral action” (2013 141),

and Hamdan likens the mariner's crime to Adam's sin of eating from "the forbidden apple" which leads to the loss of paradise (2017 27).

Robinson Crusoe opens with Robinson introducing himself to the reader and paving the way for the sin he is to commit with his eyes wide open. He is obsessed with the idea of "going to sea", which is contrary to "the will" and "the commands" of his father (1). This difference in wish and opinion creates a "conflict" between Robinson and his father on the "question" of his "future profession and social status" as Novak accurately observes (1961 19). His father, who belongs to the middle class and who is a representative of "the power of the father in puritan homes" (Novak 1961 20), a "deputy of God according to religion" (Nuruzzaman & Yeasmin 2016 26) and of God on earth according to the norms of the age of reason, counsels him against his desire of travelling and encourages him to stay in his "father's house and [his] native country" and be a prosperous individual by belonging to the middle class, and in this way avoid the fate of the people who belong to the lower class or the upper class who face a lot of hardships and changes in their lives (2). Further, he warns him against having a miserable future if he disobeys him and though he will never stop praying for him he will never bless his choice of the course of his life: "though ... he would not cease to pray for me, ... if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me, and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel when there might be none to assist in my recovery" (3; Ellipsis mine). Though his father's expostulation affects him greatly, he, later, comes to take the wrong decision by running away from his father and from his country to follow his desire of "seeing the world" "without asking God's blessing, or my father's" (4, 5). Nuruzzaman and Yeasmin rightly maintain, "Crusoe's defiance of his father's advice is equal to the original sin of Adam and Eve" (2016 25). At the beginning of his fleeing away, he has another warning in the form of a strong storm, which leads him to make a vow to return to his parents and his home "like a true repenting prodigal" son (6), but once the weather changes he forgets about his vows. A few days later, he has another warning in the form of another violent storm, which ends by foundering the ship, which leaves him "entirely without excuse": he has been counselled by his father against going to sea, and is now warned twice by "Providence" against following his desire of seeing the world utilizing the sea (7). In short, Robinson is responsible for the sin he commits and consequently for the misery he suffers later and for his fate. The third warning comes to him through the words of his friend's father who tells him "never to go to sea anymore" and "to take" what has happened as a "visible token" that he is "not to be a seafaring man" (11). His friend's father adds that since he has made this trip as a trial, he should be warned that what he is to expect is nothing more than he has seen. Moreover, he compares him to Prophet Jonah, who disobeys God by not following his instructions and is punished for his disobedience. He ends by advising him "to go back to [his] father and not tempt Providence to [his] ruin." He also warns him, "young man, ... depend upon it, if you do not go back, wherever you go, you will meet with nothing but disasters and disappointments, till your father's words are fulfilled upon you" (12; Ellipsis mine), which echoes his father's earlier warning to him.

However, instead of following the advice of his friend's father and going back to his parents, Robinson continues his disobedience by travelling to Africa aboard another ship, "a sin which he regards as the direct cause of all his sufferings" (Novak 1961 19). Here, he comments on his foolish action and similar deeds done by youth as follows, "they are not ashamed to sin, and yet are ashamed to repent; not ashamed of the action for which they ought justly to be esteemed fools" (12). He is aware of his sin against his parents and in turn against God. As if it were devilish enticement, this voyage is a success, which encourages him to make another trip, which turns out to be a total failure and a disaster and leads to his being taken as a slave by the pirates (15). This condition lasts for two years, which gives him time to think about how prophetic his father's words have been. By the end of the two years of slavery, he escapes (18), and is later "delivered" by a Portuguese ship, which takes him to Brazil where he settles for four years and sets up a plantation to be naturalized (28, 29). In Brazil, he leads a successful life similar to that of the middle class in England, which makes him repent

that he has disobeyed his father by ignoring “all his good advice,” a “regret” that makes him feel miserable, “desolate” and “solitary” (30).

Still, though leading a prosperous life in Brazil, and being obsessed with this feeling of discontent, he comes to think again of travelling and “wandering abroad,” which makes him, as he accurately comments on his deeds, “the willful agent of all my miseries” (32). Again and again, he is responsible for all his suffering and for all that befalls him. When he is made an offer to travel to Guinea to bring a cargo of Negroes to trade in them, he acquiesces, “But I that was born to be my destroyer could no more resist the offer than I could restrain my first rambling designs, when my father’s good counsel was lost upon me” (34). Thus, they prepare a ship and travel heading for Guinea to fetch the Negroes, but they never reach the coast of Africa because a violent storm breaks out and later drowns the ship with all its cargo and its men except Robinson (35–40). His being the only one delivered, the only survivor, is a boon, a bliss in itself, but in the case of Robinson, it was “a dreadful deliverance”: he has nothing about him, whether for food or protection which throws him “into terrible agonies of mind” (41). Here, where he is cast away on a desolate island his father’s prophetic words, which “have the operative power of a curse” (Novak 1961 23), come true and he is to have many years to meditate on his “original sin” (174) of neglecting his father’s advice and not caring to be blessed by his father and in turn by God. In this way, he is like our great grandfather Adam and Prophet Jonah in that when they sin against God by not following His instructions, they are punished: Adam is dismissed from Paradise, and Jonah after being swallowed by a whale is cast away on an island. In all cases, the sin of disobedience leads to being punished by God.

On the other hand, similarly, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” which falls into seven parts, opens with the narrator introducing the mariner and the context in which the mariner starts telling his story to a young man he selects from three invited to a wedding feast, “It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three” (466). The young man, who is a kin of the bridegroom, asks about the reason why for stopping him in particular, a question that the Mariner does not answer until he discloses his entire story to him. Instead of answering the wedding guest, who is in a hurry because “The guests are met, the feast is set” (467), the mariner immediately begins his narration. Though the young man is irritated by the mariner’s hold of his hand, he stands captivated by the look in “his glittering eye” and does nothing except listen to the Mariner’s tale “like a three years’ child” (467). He tells of a ship that departs the harbour and is cheered by all; an atmosphere of happiness prevails, which is reflected in the description of the ship’s departure and the gradual movement of the ship away from the port, the church, the hill and the lighthouse in addition to the movement of the sun in the sky and the sea as well (467). The ship sails southward and the weather is fair without violent winds until they reach the Equator. Then a strong storm breaks out and drives the ship toward the South Pole. Once they are at the South Pole, the weather completely changes; ice is everywhere and fearful sounds are heard though they see neither humans nor beasts,

“Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken –
The ice was all between.
“The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around;
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!” (468)

After a while of fear, chaos and confusion, an Albatross, a seabird, comes through “the fog” and they receive it as if it were “a Christian soul” with happiness and hospitality “in God’s name.” They offer the bird their hospitality and the bird accepts it, which forms a bond between them. Immediately after the coming of the bird, the weather changes and they can sail again, “The ice did split with a thunder-fit; / The helmsman steered us through!” A mild south wind breaks and drives the ship northward, which indicates that the Albatross is a bird of good omen, at least to them, and the bird follows them and daily comes to them “for food or play” whenever the sailors holler to it. This state

of friendship and hospitality lasts for nine days, while the ship runs smoothly and the moon glimmers white in the sky. However, this state of peacefulness and tranquillity comes to an end when the ancient mariner, without any revealed reason, shoots the Albatross with his "crossbow" (468), a crime for which he has no reason except "his sole sense of pride" as Hamdan observes (2017 22), which is a deadly sin, and which violates the peaceful relationship between man and beast and violates principles of hospitality; consequently, he is to be punished for destroying the innocence and peace of nature.

In this way, the mariner comes to defile the norms of hospitality, humanity and nature; he shoots the Albatross, a representative of nature, and kills a guest who puts absolute trust in the mariners. Here one is reminded of Macbeth when he murders King Duncan, his guest, but the difference between Macbeth and the mariner is that Macbeth was aware of the reason why for killing Duncan. As for the mariner, he does not reveal to the reader any cause for murdering an innocent bird, which makes his crime more brutal and evil. The second part of "The Rime" discloses to the reader what happens in the aftermath of shooting the Albatross. Similar to the complications that occur in *Robinson* after Robinson disobeys his father and goes to sea, a lot of complications and hardships take place in "The Rime." Changes in the weather do confuse them and so does the movement of the sun (468–469). "The good south wind still blew behind," but there was "no sweet bird" to follow them "for food or play"; this state leads the other mariners to accuse him of having "done a hellish thing" that will cause them a lot of trouble and grief. They also accuse him of slaying the bird "That made the breeze blow." However, when the weather changes and becomes better and the sun rises in the sky removing all fog and mist, the mariners change their minds and declare that he has "killed the bird / That brought the fog and mist." Moreover, they tell him that it was "right . . . such birds to slay / That bring the fog and mist" (469; Ellipsis mine). Once the other mariners voice such views and judgments, they become accomplices and partners in the crime of slaying the bird. The fact is that when they declare such views, they have been deceived by appearances since everything, later, changes including the weather and the movement of the sun,

"Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down;
 'Twas sad as sad could be;
 And we did speak only to break
 The silence of the sea!
 "All in a hot and copper sky,
 The bloody Sun, at noon,
 Right up above the mast did stand,
 No bigger than the Moon.
 "Day after day, day after day,
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
 As idle as a painted ship
 Upon a painted ocean." (470)

This is the beginning of the punishment that the mariners become aware of once they observe the stillness of the sea and the sun in addition to the ugliness that prevails in the sea. Water is everywhere, but there is no water to drink. Because of the stillness of the sea, everything rots and all sea creatures and the sea itself become slimy (470–471). This hellish atmosphere leads the mariners to have dreams, and to hallucinate, about a spirit that disturbs them, a spirit that has followed them "from the land of mist and snow," i.e. from where the mariner shot the Albatross. Now, the mariners, who have welcomed the brutal slaying of the bird once they have observed the good change in the weather and the smooth movement of the ship, with "withered" tongues because of "utter drought" are unable to speak, but can alter their opinions to put the whole blame on the mariner,

"Ah! Well-a-day!—what evil looks
 Had I from old and young!
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross
 About my neck was hung." (471)

When the other mariners do this symbolic action of hanging the Albatross about his neck instead of the cross, they do it with an absolute belief that they can get rid of their sense of guilt and responsibility for killing the bird forgetting that they have become partners in the crime once they praised the mariner for shooting the bird “that brought the fog and mist” (470). In short, all of them are guilty; consequently, they deserve to be punished, which is displayed in the next parts of “The Rime.”

3. Punishment, Suspicion and Repentance

In *Robinson* and “The Rime,” punishment occurs in the form of submitting the protagonist to isolation and alienation from everything around him. This state of isolation and desolation lasts as long as he is not reconciled to the things around him, to himself and to God. During this period, the protagonist comes to suspect that God is not there watching over him and protecting him. Once reconciliation, whether to the things around him, to himself or to God, happens, everything changes, and the protagonist commences a process that makes him perceive things around him in a new way, which leads him to perceive the presence of God.

Robinson is “cast upon a horrible desolate island, void of all hope of recovery” and is “divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society,” as he accurately describes his condition to the reader after he was stranded on the island, which is “environed every way with the sea” (58, 46). It is true that he is able to survive what he experiences on the island, but his stay in it, which lasts for twenty eight years, imposes isolation and loneliness on him, which is “Crusoe’s punishment for his willfulness” as Gómez correctly observes (2010 10). Four years later, he admits to the reader that he is “removed from all the wickedness of the world here” and from all the sins of the world, i.e. he is totally isolated (115). Still, he succeeds in setting up a tent and a cave for his habitation, in providing himself with food and fresh water and in protecting himself throughout the years he lives on the island. In short, he succeeds in establishing his own colony, his own kingdom, of which he comes to think that he is its sole owner (89, 115). Yet, all this success and his survival do not abolish the fact that he has lived on the island quite alone until he rescues Friday from the savages, and is thus provided with human company. Also, from the first days of his stay on the island, he never stops thinking of it as a “desolate place” or “the island of Despair,” as he calls it, and never ceases waiting for the moment of his “deliverance” (54, 61, 51). However, similar to the age of reason he belongs to, Robinson is a man of “reason,” which enables him to find the means that make his survival possible on the island, which leads him to be inventive and creative and “be in time master of every mechanic art.” Also, it enables him “to master [his] despondency” brought about by the desolation of the island. Besides, being a man of reason enables him to distinguish between what is good and what is evil about his being on this “horrid island” and “dismal place” (59, 60, 57, 56, 158).

However, though a man of reason, Robinson never gives much thought to religion or the works of Providence; he spends about seven months setting up his tent and cave and making other necessary things not aware that God is there watching over him until he sees a few stalks of barley and rice growing of their own accord, as he believes at the beginning (68). As long as he does not remember that he is the one who has thrown the grains of barley and rice, this incident astonishes him and confuses his thoughts. Up to this moment, he has never acted upon “religious foundations at all,” has “had very few notions of religion” and has “entertained” the idea that all that has “befallen” him is nothing but a “chance.” It never occurs to him that it might be “the end of Providence in these things or His order in governing events in the world.” In short, this event of the barley growing leads him to think “that God had miraculously caused this grain to grow without any help of seed sown and that it was so directed purely for my sustenance on that wild miserable place.” Yet, once he remembers that he is the one who has thrown these seeds, everything changes since the sense of “wonder” ceases; therefore, his “religious thankfulness to God’s Providence” abates (69). In short, his reasoning leads him to suspect God’s Providence and become unable to see its aims, and hence oscillates between belief and disbelief.

The hardships, like that of illness, he suffers and the natural disasters, like that of the earthquake, he confronts on the island make him persevere in his suspicion that God is not there to save him. When he is ill with fever, he prays "to God for the first time" on the island, but he scarcely knows what he says and the reason why for saying it due to his "confused" "thoughts" and his being "lightheaded" and "so ignorant" of what he should say, and ends up by crying, "Lord, look upon me! Lord, pity me! Lord, have mercy upon me!" (77). Later, when he sleeps, he has a "terrible dream" in which he sees "a man descend from a great black cloud, in a bright flame of fire, and light upon the ground," and then moves "forward towards" him "with a long spear or weapon in his hand to kill him" (77-78). Next, this man approaches him and addresses him in "a voice so terrible" that terrifies Robinson. What the man says, though in a dream, – "Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die" (78) – is a real warning to him, which will later awaken his soul and make him realize that he needs to show his regret and to express his repentance for the sin he has committed against God by disobeying his parents. However, up to this moment, Robinson has had "no divine knowledge," which makes him similar to other sailors "hardened, unthinking, wicked creature" who does not have "the least sense either of the fear of God in danger or of thankfulness to God in deliverances." For this reason, he never has a thought that what happens to him is "a just punishment for my sin: my rebellious behaviour against my father, or my present sins, which were great; or so much as a punishment for the general course of my wicked life" (78). This is why the dream he has while being sick frightens him and consequently awakens his soul, his "conscience" (80), to the need to repent and to atone for his sin. Thus, for the first time in many years, he prays to God and asks for his help. Later, when he is a little better, he, amid all elements of nature, starts meditating on the maker of earth, sea and "all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal," which leads him to perceive the existence of God and realize his Providence (81, 81-82).

While looking for a roll of tobacco to use as a cure for his fever, Robinson accidentally finds three Bibles he brought from the shipwreck and takes one of them. At this moment, he has a feeling that he is "directed by Heaven no doubt" for at the same time he finds "a cure both for soul and body": tobacco cures his body; the Bible his soul (83). When he opens the Bible, he, by chance, reads, "Call on Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify Me". Here he finds God's promise to deliver, but due to his lack of faith he doubts the promise when he asks himself, "Can God Himself deliver me from this place?" (83) Owing to the desolation he suffers he does not perceive that he has been delivered by God's Providence. Still, he muses on the words he reads in the Bible, and later prays to God, as if to test Him to see if He is to deliver him, "but before I lay down, I did what I never had done in all my life; I kneeled and prayed to God to fulfil the promise to me, that if I called upon Him in the day of trouble, He would deliver" (84). His prayer indicates how he still suspects God's ability to save him physically and spiritually. However, when he is recovered from his illness, he realizes how unthankful he has been to God, and starts glorifying Him by giving thanks to Him to deserve "greater deliverance," i.e. "deliverance from sin" which is "a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction" (85, 86). The words of the man in the dream in addition to God's words in the Bible lead him to pray to God to give him repentance. By the time of the first anniversary of his landing on the island, he is aware of how sinful he has been, and that is why he confesses his "sins to God" and acknowledges "His righteous judgments upon" him and prays "to Him to have mercy on" him (92). This recognition, later, enables him to accept God's Providence, reconcile himself to the will of God and be thankful to Him, which reflects the spiritual change that Robinson undergoes (96-97, 100, 116-119). However, his disposition of being thankful to God does not omit the fact that he, now and then, complains of being "forsaken of God and man" and even accuses himself of being "a hypocrite" when he thinks of giving "thanks to God for bringing me to this place" (101).

Years later, after having various experiences on the island and the sea around it and after "resigning" himself to God's "Providence," though he leads a practically happy and successful life there, he never forgets that he is cut off from "society" (129, 133-134) which underlines his desire to have

society back. Nonetheless, when he sees a footprint of a man for the first time on the island, he becomes terrified and comes to entertain frightful ideas about the probability that it could be of the devil or the savages. The fear he enjoys at the time banishes his “religious hope” and his “former confidence in God,” which affects his spiritual tranquillity and his reconciliation with himself and with God (140, 138–143). The fear he entertains leads him to suspect and complain that God is not there to protect and deliver him,

Thus fear of danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than danger itself, when apparent to the eyes; ...; and *which was worse than all this, I had not that relief in this trouble from the resignation I used to practice*, that I hoped to have. *I looked, I thought, like Saul, who complained not only that the Philistines were upon him but that God had forsaken him*; for I did not now take due ways to compose my mind by crying to God in my distress, and resting upon His providence, as I had done before, for my defense and deliverance. (143; Ellipsis mine; Italics mine)

Fear as well as Robinson’s lack of confident belief in God leads him to suspect God’s Providence once he is in trouble or distress, which underscores his need for repentance for all his sins, something that he does when he abates and gets rid of his fear and frightful ideas.

Similarly, in the third part of “The Rime”, the process of punishment and atonement for killing the Albatross continues. In the previous part, the punishment occurs in the form of the stillness of the sea and the sun in addition to the lack of drinking water though they are surrounded by water everywhere. Besides, because of the stillness, ugliness prevails, which they abhor. In an attempt to escape their sense of guilt and to put the whole blame on the mariner, the sailors hang the slain Albatross around his neck (470–471). Suffering from drought and thirst continues, which affects the sailors greatly. When he sees a ship approaching them, none of them can make a voice, and the mariner, to free himself from thirst, bites his arm to suck his blood to be able to cry at the ship,

“With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, ‘A sail! A sail!’ (471)

Deceived by appearances, they feel joy for the ship’s coming that may save them. As if the ship responding to their call, it stops, but it does this by standing between them and the sun, which creates a terrifying atmosphere; the ship is nothing but a skeleton,

“Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that Woman’s mate?”
“Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold;
Her skin was white as leprosy;
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man’s blood with cold. (472)

This frightening description of the woman, who stands for Life-in-Death, unveils the reality of the ship and demolishes any hope of deliverance at the hands of its crew. Instead, they infuse fear that thickens blood in all the mariners. Besides, contrary to what the mariners have expected, they find out that the Woman and Death are playing a game on their lives and souls. The Woman wins the ancient mariner, and thus he is destined for Life-in-Death. As for the other mariners, they are won by Death, and thus they are fated to die (472). After that everything changes in a terrible way and fear pervades, “Fear at my heart, as at a cup, / My lifeblood seemed to sip!” (472). What follows after

that is more terrifying; the other mariners die “One after one” without a “groan or sigh,” but instead each one of them turns his face to him “with a ghastly pang” and curses him “with his eye” (473). In this way, a crew of two hundred sailors dies one by one cursing him,

“The souls did from their bodies fly—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my crossbow!” (473)

It is a terrible incident in which the death of each sailor reminds the mariner of his brutal crime, an offence for which he has to show repentance and atone for it.

As for the ancient mariner, contrary to what the wedding guest fears, he never dies. Similar to Robinson, he is left alone to suffer loneliness and isolation and to have a destiny similar to that of the woman, Life-in-Death. Also, similar to Robinson, he comes to suspect that God is not there to watch over him and help him,

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony. (473)

It agonizes him to see the men lying dead aboard the ship, to find himself similar to thousands of “slimy things” living and to feel abhorrence about the slimy things and “the rotting sea” (473). The suspicion he feels and the feeling of repugnance make him unable to pray, and instead of “a prayer” there comes “a wicked whisper” that makes his “heart as dry as dust” (474). This “pathetic state of alienation and desperation” (Weng 2013 143) lasts for “seven days and seven nights” (474) during which the curse, “the mirror of his guilt” (Vlasopolos 1979 368), directed towards him from the eyes of the dead men never changes; as for him, he neither sleeps nor dies. Later, the smooth movement of the moon in the sky and the heavenly light shed on “the water snakes” moving “in tracks” in the sea reflecting the white light of the moon touches the mariner’s heart and brings about an unexpected change in him,

“O happy living things! No tongue
Their beauty might declare;
A spring of love gushed from my heart;
And I blessed them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware. (474–475)

Suddenly, the mariner becomes aware of the hidden beauty of the sea creatures and can perceive how happy they live without complaining. This change enables him to bless them instead of loathing them and even to feel love towards them. This transformation in his disposition, which Vlasopolos “attributes” “to the perceiving mind, not to natural phenomena” (1979 365), enables him to perceive that God is there to have “pity on” him, which enables him to be reconciled to himself and the other creatures and even bless them. Besides, he becomes able to pray, which rids him of the bird hanging about his neck,

“The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.” (475)

Hamdan correctly remarks, “the mariner survives alone and feels lonely till he realizes repentance and discovers the value of every living thing; he attains forgiveness and salvation” (2017 22). Thus, similar to Robinson, the moment he feels repentance, he starts regaining himself and becomes able to pray, which is an important step towards his reconciliation with God.

4. The Perception of the Presence of God and Reconciliation

One observes that once Robinson and the mariner stop suspecting that God is not there to protect and deliver them and once they cease complaining because of this suspicion, they come to perceive the presence of God, which usually happens to them while they are “unaware,” i.e. while they are not conscious of the feelings that infuse them at this moment (Rime, 475). This perception leads them to be in harmony with nature, with the creatures created by God and with themselves, which makes their reconciliation with God possible. Yet, this perception needs to be checked and that is why they go through a process of atonement.

Earlier in *Robinson*, Robinson comes to perceive the presence of God when he meditates about everything created by God, about himself and about what occurs to him,

What is this earth and sea, of which I have seen so much? Whence is it produced? And what am I and all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal, whence are we?

Sure we are all made by some secret Power who formed the earth and the sea, the air and sky; and who is that?

Then it followed most naturally, It is God that has made it all. (81–82)

However, as I mentioned earlier, his lack of confident faith leads him to question the will of God forgetting that he is the one who has sinned and consequently deserved punishment (82). Later when he sees the unknown footprint of a man, fear leads him to complain that God has forsaken him though he is quite aware that God has saved him from death and danger throughout his prior years on the island. He acts like King Saul who was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel, but later disobeys Him and persists in his sin, and consequently is abandoned by God (143; See also *My Book of Bible Stories*, story 56 “Saul – Israel’s First King”). Robinson’s behaviour highlights the fact that his perception of God is not enough; he needs to have constant faith in God, to perform due repentance to Him and to atone for all his sins, and in this way be shriven of his guilt. Meditating he concludes that fear banishes faith and that “a temper of peace, thankfulness, love, and affection is much more the proper frame for prayer” since “praying to God being properly an act of the mind, not of the body” (147). Later, when he discovers that savages come to the other side of the island to feast on their human victims, he thanks God for landing him where he was shipwrecked and regrets his earlier complaints about being stranded on this side of the island. In short, he becomes thankful to God and reconciles himself to God’s providence to him throughout the years of his stay on the island (148–149). His discovery of the savages makes him realize how “merciful” is God; God always delivers us though we have no idea that He is there directing and helping us while we doubt in his Providence and complain because of our ignorance (157). In the beginning, he feels hatred and repugnance of the savages and their customs, but he comes to tolerate them and their brutal habits, a point to be discussed later.

Similar to what happens in *Robinson*, in “The Rime” when the mariner perceives the hidden beauty of the water snakes, he feels “a spring of love” gushing from his heart, which leads him to bless “them unaware” and be able to “pray.” This same feeling makes him perceive that God is there watching over him and has “pity on” him, which frees him of the burden of the Albatross hung about his neck (474–475), a step toward his being freed from his guilt. Yet, this perception needs to be checked and that is why he goes through a process of atonement.

In part five, once the mariner blesses the water snakes and becomes able to pray, he sleeps, and it rains as well, which is quite symbolic of the forgiveness he is granted. After a long period of drought, he drinks, whether in his dreams or his wake. When he comes to, he hears the sounds of “a roaring wind” but it does not come near the ship. Yet, this wind “with its sound” shakes the sails. Moreover, he sees strange sights, whether in the air, the sky or the sea, and again it rains heavily (475). What is more extraordinary is that, though the wind never reaches the ship, it starts moving it (476). Still, what is odder is that the dead men rise and start working at their usual posts on the ship, but they neither speak nor move their eyes, “They raised their limbs like lifeless tools— / We were a ghastly

crew.” However, it is not the dead crew that has moved the ship, “But a troop of spirits blest” (476). When it is dawn, the souls leave their bodies, and they go back to their places aboard the ship, but still, the ship keeps sailing “slowly and smoothly.” However, at noon the ship stands still, and the sun fixes the ship to the ocean. Suddenly the ship moves in an unstable way that leads to his fainting. When he comes to, he overhears two voices arguing about his brutal crime of shooting the innocent Albatross with his bow. He finds out that the Polar Spirit loved the bird that he killed, and that he wants revenge on the mariner who murdered it (477). One of the voices sees that the mariner deserves further punishment, and the other sees he has done enough repentance, “The man hath penance done / And penance more will do.” In part six, the two voices continue arguing about how the ship moves towards the north. Yet, they depart before the mariner awakens from his “trance” to find the ship still “sailing” and the weather “gentle.” When it is night, the dead men rise again and do their usual jobs, but this time they fix “their stony eyes” on him (478), which reminds him of his crime,

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away;
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray. (478–479)

Due to his inability to forgive himself for what happened to the mariners, once he sees the curse in their eyes he loses the ability to pray, which is quite similar to what happens to Robinson when he is obsessed with fear. Later, when the curse is broken, he comes to see things differently and to feel the unseen wind airing his face, and thought, “It mingled strangely with my fears, / yet it felt like a welcoming” (479). Immediately after that, the ship sails and takes him back to his country seeing on his way the lighthouse, the hill and the church. Seeing his country leads him to pray while sobbing, “O let me be awake, my God! / or let me sleep away” (479). What happens later to the bodies of the dead crew indicates that they are forgiven, and so is he. After that he is rescued by the Pilot, the Pilot’s boy and the Hermit, whom the mariner believes will free his soul from guilt, “He’ll shrive my soul, he’ll wash away / The Albatross blood” (480). Since he is not yet fully reconciled to himself, he cannot believe that he has done enough penance and that the only one who can purge him of his guilt is the Hermit. In part seven, the Hermit who spends most of his time worshipping God (480) prays for him and later asks the mariner to tell his story, something that the mariner does immediately, which frees him and rids him of his sense of guilt (482). However, this sense of guilt returns to him now and then, which leads him to choose someone, as he has done with the wedding guest, to retell his tale and in this way free himself,

“Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.
“I pass, like light, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me—
To him my tale I teach. (482–483)

It is as if every time he tells his story he makes a confession, and in this way rids himself of his sense of guilt, as if the process of atonement never comes to an end.

5. Tolerance: An Implied Message

The experiences through which both Robinson and the mariner go and the severe agonies they are submitted to teach them to tolerate others since they are not perfect; like all human beings they are sinners. In short, they acquire a sense of tolerance, which enables them to accept others as they are and to tolerate their “religious differences” (Cooney 2007 198) with them.

In *Robinson*, when Robinson sees the remains of human bodies on the island for the first time, he is overwhelmed and terrified by the horribleness of the scene that reflects the “brutality” inherent in “human nature,” and feels “abhorrence of the savage wretches” and their “inhuman custom of” “eating one another” (148, 149). His repugnance leads him to entertain various thoughts and plans about destroying these savages when they come back to the island to feast on their defeated enemies and save the victims from them. However, later when he abates and debates this issue with himself, he concludes that he has no right to meddle with their rituals and customs since they neither attacked him nor harmed him in any way. Also, he thinks that it might be the will of God that they do this punishment on one another to achieve His justice for them without being aware that they are committing a crime against one another. In this way, if he interferes with their custom, he will be sinning “of willful murder” similar to that of those Christians who kill their prisoners of war or that “of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practiced in America.” Besides, when he considers this issue from a religious perspective, he becomes convinced that it is not his duty to meddle with their practices and that it is up to God to judge and punish them to execute His justice on them as it “pleases Him” (151–155). Later on, after saving Friday and after civilizing him, when the savages re-appear on the island, he entertains similar thoughts and concludes that he can neither “be a judge of their actions” nor “an executioner of His Justice.” Brian C. Cooney rightly observes that “Defoe twice stands Crusoe behind the brush looking down upon the rituals of cannibals for the character to debate in his mind the limits within an ostensibly neutral, liberal society of religious tolerance” (2007 198). By deciding “not to meddle with them” (209) unless they attack him and to endure their rituals and beliefs though he does not approve of them, Robinson displays his ability to tolerate them as well as their religious customs which are contrary to all his Christian beliefs. In short, as Novak remarks, he “regards the cannibals with a certain degree of tolerance” (1963 50). Moreover, later after saving Friday’s father and a Spaniard from the savages, he, Friday and the other two come to live peacefully together though they uphold different religious beliefs. Like Robinson, Friday is “a Protestant” while Friday’s father is “a Pagan and a cannibal” and the Spaniard is “a Papist.” Still, Robinson’s experiences and meditations lead him to allow “liberty of conscience” in his kingdom (217). In other words, his experiences have taught him tolerance, which enables him to tolerate others and their religious difference and to allow religious freedom on his island.

Similar to Robinson, the experiences and the agonies that the mariner suffered in his journey has taught him tolerance, which enables him to accept others as they are and to cope with their religious difference. Now, contrary to the past, he is certain that God is always there to help him and save his soul from cosmic loneliness. His utter pleasure is,

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths, and maidens gay! (483)

Going to church in the company of others to pray does not necessitate that all of them pray to the same God or that they uphold the same beliefs; each is to pray to “his great Father” without forcing others to believe in what he believes in. In short, tolerating others’ beliefs is a must. Only those who love well can pray well; “He prayeth well who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast” (483). It is love in its greater sense when it includes all creatures created by God. The more you love God’s creatures without distinction between them the more you pray well and the more perfect you are,

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (483)

Tolerance leads us to tolerate others and their beliefs, and consequently to accept them as they are, which enables us to love them unconditionally, which in turn enables us to pray well and be closer to God and to perfection.

6. Conclusion

This study has aimed to undertake a comparative reading of *Robinson Crusoe* and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to underscore the individual experiences of the protagonists of the two works. Utilizing a close reading and meticulous analysis of the two works, they are comparable as displayed. The comparison has revealed that the protagonist in each has committed a guilt that affects his present and future life. Both are responsible for their choice, which leads to suffering and punishment. Their punishment occurs in the form of isolation and alienation imposed on them in desolate places: island and sea. The isolation enforced on them leads them to find out how guilty they have been when they committed their sin/crime, which makes them aware that they deserve to be punished. Still, while they are suffering punishment, they suspect that God is not there watching over them and guarding them, which leads them to unjustly complain. However, once they perceive the gravity of the committed sin, they start repenting and atoning for what they have done, which leads to their reconciliation with themselves and with God. Once they stop suspecting, they perceive that God is always there watching and protecting them though they are unaware and are sinners, which brings about their salvation and deliverance. The severe experiences they undergo teach them tolerance and enable them to tolerate religious differences with others and accept them as they are. This tolerance teaches them to love others and be better believers in God who can be closer to Him and hope for perfection once armed with their true perception of God.

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Notes

¹ It deserves mentioning here that, in the beginning, I avoided mentioning or referring to Blair’s study since I do not have any valid documentation except that of being published on Academia. However, after a discussion with my colleague Professor Areeg Ibrahim, I came to embrace her viewpoint that since I do not have an alternative it is better to refer to it and use it.

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“I cannot rest while this history remains untold”: (Re)Shaping Ophelia in Lisa Klein’s and Claire McCarthy’s *Ophelia*

ROCÍO MOYANO REJANO

Abstract: The intertextual dialogue between art and literature has played a significant role over the last centuries and even more so in contemporary fiction, as evidenced by the growing number of works that explore this theme. Considering the term interfigural as a starting point, the character of Ophelia in Lisa Klein’s homonymous novel *Ophelia* (2006) may not be considered to be exactly identical to the one depicted in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603). What Lisa Klein intends to offer is Ophelia’s story from her own perspective since she had been silenced or to a greater extent, depicted by the male gaze such as her own father Polonius or Hamlet himself. That is why it is impossible to have two identical characters in two literary works by different authors. There is also a fine example of pictorial intertextuality in the film version of Klein’s novel released in 2018, as it features images of Ophelia from the Pre-Raphaelite paintings.

To examine the concept of reverse ekphrasis, I will examine John Everett Millais’s painting *Ophelia*, which depicts Ophelia’s drowning in Act IV. There have been many references and pastiche images of the drowned woman in art, film, and photography. Klein’s intertextual dialogue with this Pre-Raphaelite painting, as well as the film adaptation of this novel, demonstrates the complexity of pictorial-film intertextuality. In order to demonstrate this, Shakespeare’s text produces two dialogues that are in accordance: first, this text is transformed into images leading to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, while Lisa Klein’s novel is told from Ophelia’s perspective through interfigural. The mediums of image and word then are combined into creating another image, since Klein’s text and the aforementioned Pre-Raphaelite painting are incorporated into a film adaptation.

Keywords: Ophelia, Pre-Raphaelite painting, pictorial intertextuality, reverse ekphrasis, interfigural

Introductory Remarks

Since its publication in 1603, *Hamlet* has inspired successive generations of writers. There have been several “derivative works” of *Hamlet* that introduce the story from the point of view of other characters or transfer the story into a new setting as sequels or prequels to *Hamlet*. In Ophelia’s case, we have an extensive numbers of rewrites that have been written from her point of view. Although this character appears in only five of the twenty scenes in *Hamlet*, Ophelia is mentioned in two of the others – by Polonius and Laertes. Not only has she been a source of inspiration for painters and filmmakers but also she has been examined by structuralism, deconstruction, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and new historicism.

Does Ophelia really deserve all the attention she gets? Do they tell us everything that they say is true? As we read *Hamlet* for the first time, we were given scarce information about Ophelia. We learn that she is Polonius’ daughter, or better yet, *Hamlet*’s betrothed wife. We have seen in contemporary English fiction that she is more than just a secondary character in the original source and that

she gives voice to her story from her own perspective, rather than the perspective one previously told. In the same way, the Pre-Raphaelite society has a wide range of representations of Ophelia. Moreover, this group of artists has become a repeated reference in the contemporary representations and revisions of Victorian culture. Neo-Victorian writers use Pre-Raphaelite artists and their art to comment on images and norms of femininity in the nineteenth century, as Murray states, “the prominence of womanhood and femininity is something that Pre-Raphaelitism and Neo-Victorianism have in common as cultural movements, and which act as influencers upon each other.” (25). Similarly, contemporary criticism continues to examine the dialogue between literature and painting, reconsidering classical approaches to the subject such as Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Paragone of Painting*. Here, Da Vinci argued that “painting is superior to poetry” and “painting surpasses all human works by the subtle considerations belonging to it” (653). What he aims to do is to contrast the direct images of the painting that are generated by the painter with the mental images of poetry that are based on the interpretation of the reader. Literature and painting differ greatly in their treatment of time in terms of persistence. What is the difference between the aesthetic reception of a text over time and that of a painting over an instant? It depends on the characteristics and limitations of each medium. Joseph Frank’s argument starts from the observation that literature and the plastic arts, working through different sensuous mediums, must therefore differ in the fundamental laws governing their creation (223). That is, a painting captures a moment or a short stretch of time since it is static. As opposed to this, a written work is dynamic across time and space, with the possibility of appreciating its transition. As Joseph Frank points out, Ephraim Lessing’s vision of plastic art’s limitations is based on this assessment: “Form in the plastic arts, according to Lessing, is necessarily spatial, because the visible aspect of objects can best be presented juxtaposed in an instant of time. On the other hand, literature makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time (223)”

W. J. T. Mitchell in his *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* goes further in Lessing’s arguments on the temporality of the plastic arts claiming that

Some paintings represent temporal events, scenes from a narrative, or even a sequence of images that suggests movement, one can expect one of the following replies: 1) the temporality implied in a narrative painting is not directly given by its signs, but must be inferred from a single spatialized scene; 2) such temporal inferences, and the clues which suggest them, are not the primary business of painting, which is to present forms in sensuous instantaneous immediacy, and not to aspire to the status of discourse or narrative. (101)

The fact that temporality must be inferred in a painting indicates that it cannot be represented directly by the medium. This is because a painting is both static and temporal, thus it cannot fill in the gaps of the narrative. Spatial objects can be defined in a variety of ways. What Mitchell intends to argue is that due to the static and temporal nature of a painting is difficult to fill the gaps in the story narrated. Contrarily, a written work offers a transition in which it can be appreciated the course of events to the point of completion which has been missing in a painting. Both mediums are in accordance with supplying and completing what has been missing or lacking.

Shaping Ophelia in Shakespeare’s text and Pre-Raphaelite Painting

The first time Ophelia is introduced in the play is as Polonius’ daughter, this detail can be insignificant but we can observe that Ophelia is subordinated to patriarchal society. She is described as being obedient and indecisive. She doesn’t know whether to believe Hamlet’s affections or her father’s words. As Jameson comments, “she says very little, and what she does say seems rather intended to hide than to reveal the emotions of her heart”. (262) Ophelia begins to lose her senses due to Hamlet’s mistreatment. His behaviour is, in fact, a reflection of the aggression he feels toward his mother. Ophelia is a passive character, mainly silent, that wants to be active. She breaks her silence when madness strikes her, and her words reveal a lot about the play. Consequently “[most of]

Ophelia's representation depicted her as a gracious girl, who did not lose her beauty or her proper countenance" (Falchi 176) Gertrude reports Ophelia's death in one of the most lovely, poignant, poetic speeches in all of Shakespeare. She uses nature, water, and flower imagery to show how she is now free of the cruel human world. For that reason, "the moments before her death were typically considered appropriate for Victorian standards, as ladies could draw from it a vital lesson on the lessons of abandoning themselves to their own passions [since] the anticipation of Ophelia's tragic ending would have satisfied the converted desire for pathos" (Falchi 176). When Hamlet leaves Ophelia alone after the nunnery suggestion, she laments the decline of Hamlet and ends her lines with "O, woe is me, To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene V, lines 174–175). In act four, her lines are in her state of madness, yet have enough sense to them. She addresses Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes with her words about death, burial, and mourning, and also of young girls betrayed by unfaithful lovers. She refers to her father's death and Hamlet's behaviour, and finally, her sad fate with, "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be" (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene V lines 48–49). Ophelia's final words are addressed to either Hamlet, her father, or even herself and her lost innocence:

*And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead.
Go to thy deathbed.
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God 'a mercy on his soul.
And of all Christians' souls, I pray God. God be wi' you.*

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene V lines 213– 224).

Ophelia's treatment and representation in English contemporary fiction has been changing in the last two centuries, especially since the emergence of the modernist movement. As a result, she has been portrayed as a much more active and empowered character and certain gaps in the original text have been filled. We can also ponder the next questions. Does Hamlet really love Ophelia? Has Ophelia been seduced by Hamlet? Does she kill herself intentionally or does she really want to die? Peterson and Williams claim that

Ophelia is a screen on which a culture projects its preoccupations and reflects its values back onto itself. In this sense, analyzing an example of Ophelian representation at a specific historical juncture is, thus, also a neat, shorthand way to examine the workings of ideology more broadly. Reinvented for every age, Ophelia tells us more about ourselves at whatever instance we feel compelled to tell "her" story. Moreover, she has become an endlessly adaptable symbol for the universality of the feminine and, more broadly, the human psychic condition in any era, across cultures. (2)



Ophelia, John Everett Millais, 1851. Courtesy: Tate Gallery, London.

She has become a model of femininity for Pre-Raphaelite artists, not only did she embodied an example of purity but she also became a prototype of many values. Many of these paintings did not represent her as a vessel; instead she became a tragic heroine and was given some agency. Ophelia's portrayal in Pre-Raphaelite art somewhat determines her later representation in contemporary English fiction. In such a case, Ophelia's image is influenced not only by Shakespeare's source text, but also by pre-Raphaelite paintings that show another side of her, or, to a significant degree, a different side of Ophelia. For instance, Ophelia's Millais represents her suicide in a beautiful portrayal surrounded by water, nature, and flowers that makes this scene full of symbolism (fig.1).

Clearly, the moment chosen by Mr. Millais is that, when Ophelia, not yet dead, is still floating in the water, and gaily singing as she goes to her fancied bridal. Now, at this moment, Ophelia, in Shakespeare's text, is evidently not floating horizontally on the water, as in Mr. Millais's picture, but buoyed up, in the attitude of a mermaid, by 'her clothes spread wide.' Whether the graceful management of this attitude by a painter would be easy, we do not know; but certainly, if it were, a painting so conceived would strike less painfully, not to say less awkwardly, than one in which the corpse-like length of robe and figure suggests so literally the drowning woman. (Ruskin 218)

To do that, the aforementioned concept of interfigurality will be analysed and applied. As for the pictorial core, applying the above-mentioned term of reverse ekphrasis, a pictorial corpus will be offered consisting of Pre-Raphaelite paintings that introduce the presence of Ophelia. Painting and literature ought not to be treated as two separate disciplines in this paper, what this paper intends to offer is an extensive and detailed study on how this character's depiction has been represented in the last two centuries. In other words, Ophelia's portrayal in Pre-Raphaelite art somehow determines her later representation in contemporary English fiction. In such a case, Ophelia's image is influenced not only by Shakespeare's source text, but also by pre-Raphaelite paintings that show another side of her, or, to a significant degree, a different side of Ophelia. As Mary Pipher asserts in her book *Reviving Ophelia*,

The story of Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* shows the destructive forces that affect young women. As a young girl Ophelia is happy and free, but with adolescence she loses herself. When she falls in love with Hamlet, she lives only for his approval. She has no inner direction; rather, she struggles to meet the demands of Hamlet and her father. (20)

In the same line, the intertextual dialogue between art and literature has played a significant role over the last centuries and even more so in contemporary fiction, as evidenced by the growing number of works that explore this theme. Interfigurality is an umbrella term coined by Wolfgang G. Müller and it is defined as "the interrelations that exist between characters of different texts" (101). According to him, interfigurality represents "one of the most important dimensions of intertextuality" (102). Before broaching the interfigural issue more deeply, a brief distinction of the two texts may be taken into account in order to bring home their uniqueness as literary works. Regarding the distinctiveness of Shakespeare's text, the character of Ophelia ought not to be considered as being entirely identical neither in Pre-Raphaelite paintings nor contemporary novel. Generally speaking, it is impossible to have two identical characters in two literary works by different authors. Ophelia in Klein is completely different from the one in *Hamlet*, as previously mentioned. The play describes her as an obedient and indecisive character who does not know whether to believe her father's words or Hamlet's affections. Her subordination to patriarchal society prevents her from having self-determination. Ophelia in *Hamlet* is often referred to as a *femme fragile* (Romanska 497) because she exemplifies the frustration and fragility of women in patriarchal societies. In contrast, she has also been hailed since the Romantic period as a cult figure that encouraged necro-aesthetics, as illustrated in numerous paintings of her corpse showing her vibrant and sensual. Despite this, she is given a voice and a sense of agency in contemporary English fiction. Müller's interfigurality explains this fact since it is impossible for two literary works by different authors to be identical. When Ophelia

is placed in a different setting, she becomes a new version of herself or a completely unique Ophelia. Similarly, Klein's continuous theme of intertextual references also has another effect that concentrates on how the character of Ophelia is received, especially by contemporary audiences familiar with the source text. Evidently, both texts, Shakespeare's play and Klein's novel are two different literally formats, which consequently results in two different receptions thereof. By pastiching Ophelia's story, various writers try to offer her so-called agency and tell her story on her own terms. Through this agency, the reader is able to change their perception of the story. This will impact on the reception of the events of the plot, including Ophelia's survival, which changes the message and possible meaning behind the trope of the dead woman since according to the definition provided by the Oxford dictionary of Reference and Allusion, Ophelia is defined as "a woman floating in water, a madwoman" (264).

Taking the concept of interfigurality as a starting point, we can observe that Lisa Klein's *Ophelia* (2006) may not be considered as being entirely identical to the one depicted in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603). What Lisa Klein intends to offer is Ophelia's story from her own perspective since she had been silenced or to a great extent, depicted from the male gaze such as her own father Polonius or Hamlet himself. That is why it is impossible to have two identical characters in two literary works by different authors. Unlike other *Hamlet* rewritings, this novel recounts Hamlet's story from Ophelia's point of view, suggesting what might happen to her between and beyond the lines of Shakespeare's play. She is depicted as empowered and active character whose decisions have relevant significance for the plot. Her "suicide" is orchestrated by herself and we have future events following this event. The novel opens with a prologue set in November 1601 in St. Emilion, France. In it, Ophelia learns, through a letter from Horatio, of the happenings in Demark after her departure:

The royal court of Denmark is in ruins. The final fruits of evil have spilled their deadly seeds. At last, King Claudius is dead, justly served his own poison. Hamlet slew him with a sword envenomed by the king himself. Queen Gertrude lies cold, poisoned by a cup the king intended for Hamlet. It was the sight of his dying mother that spurred Hamlet's revenge at last. (Klein 1)

The messenger commends Hamlet after Laertes and Hamlet kill each other: "Believe me, before his desire for revenge seized him, he loved you deeply" (Klein 1). Klein plays with familiar material here. In the play, Hamlet charges his friend with repairing his reputation after being poisoned:

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

(*Hamlet*, Act V, Scene II, lines 335–344)

In Hamlet's Shakespeare, Gertrude reveals Ophelia's death to Laertes and Claudius in Act 4, scene 7, and Laertes and Hamlet leap into her grave in Act 5, scene 1. At this point, we might wonder how Ophelia escaped death. What is the purpose of Horatio's letter to her? Ophelia tells her side of the story in the pages that follow, answering some of these questions. During her narrative, she offers certain insights into her relationship with her father and why she is compelled to leave both Hamlet – they are even married in this version – and Elsinore's court behind. In explaining this to Horatio, she says: "I tried and failed to change his bloody course. There can be no peace or good in being yoked to a husband who is intent upon revenge. Therefore I go" (Klein 230–231).

Before going deeper in the analysis of the painting selected for the corpus, the representation of certain Shakespearean heroines in artistic styles may be tackled. To do that, the concept of ekphrasis will be analysed to establish the relationship between word and image. As it is offered in the Classical Dictionary, ekphrasis is defined as "the rhetorical description of a work of art". Although this term

was initially restricted to the interaction between painting and poetry and its backward process, for many critics this term has been redefined including the *tableau vivant*, theatricalization and filmic ekphrasis. When examining how literary texts are transferred from one medium to the other, it is necessary not to thrust aside the fact that the target visual text, having originated through reverse ekphrasis, ought to be dealt with both in terms of their artistic greatness and in terms of their conditions as transpositions of literary source texts. English painting has a vast list of images based on literary texts from William Shakespeare, Lord Tennyson, John Milton or John Keats, what is significant is that these literary texts have been depicted by different artists, as it will be analysed in this paper. As Benton and Butcher argue on the treatment of paintings based on Shakespeare's plays,

Painting a Shakespearean scene is itself an interpretation; as it best, it can open up elements of the literary text and be viewed as a sort of performance that offers a form of understanding akin to that reached through watching a scene in production [...] The traditional literary critical argument over Shakespeare has been whether to treat his plays as extended poems or as acting scripts. (54)

A literary text usually borrows for a visual image, more specifically for a painting, a certain theme or moment that is going to represent the ground for a transposition resulting in a "literary art". Conversely, through reverse ekphrasis, the painter is a mediator between the written text and the visual code. During the nineteenth century the dialogue between literature and art was quite close, determining certain critics to define that a dramatist is the person responsible for making good pictures; consequently, painters were quite often viewed as artists who possessed the skills required in order to render the "dramatic potential of a poet's imagined picture", as Martin Meisel (69) remarks. Peterson and Williams argue that

Ophelia is not the subject of these artistic explorations but John Everett Millais is with Ophelia remaining as an index for Pre-Raphaelite notions of feminine beauty, death, lack of agency [...] Millais' floating Ophelia is a marvellous accident of her painters' aesthetic prescriptions that post-nineteenth-century artists have wished to reinterrogate critically, just as the Pre-Raphaelite movement had done before them. (4)

To examine the concept of reverse ekphrasis, John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia* will be examined, and its latter transposition in another image in Claire McCarthy film. In such a case, the painting depicts Ophelia's drowning in the play though such scene is not seen on stage. The episode is instead referred to by Queen Gertrude and Ophelia's brother Laertes in a conversation whose events shown in the canvas are not actually seen on stage. They are instead referred to in a conversation between Queen Gertrude and Ophelia's brother Laertes. Gertrude describes how Ophelia fell into the river while picking flowers and slowly drowned, singing all the while. Most of the flowers in *Ophelia* are included either because they are mentioned in the play, or for their symbolic value. In Act IV scene 5, Ophelia delivers flowers, implying she's not insane and hiding a specific message to her audience. Among the flowers she delivers, it can be found: rosemary (remembrance), pansies (thoughts), fennel (flattery, false love), columbine (faithlessness, forsaken love), rue (repentance, bitterness), daisies (unhappy love, innocence) and violets (modesty, faithfulness) to express her feelings. In this monologue, she makes a series of very specific accusations out of extreme grief, not just a chaotic ramble about flowers. There is meticulous botanical detail put into depicting the plants, many of which hold symbolic meaning. In response to her brother Laertes's praise of Ophelia as 'rose of May,' she is probably surrounded by roses, along with a field rose on the bank. A willow, nettle, and daisy represent forsaken love, pain, and innocence, while pansies represent love in vain. Violets, which Ophelia wears as a necklace, symbolize faithfulness, chastity, and the death of the young. In addition to this, there are also forget-me-nots floating in the water and a poppy that represents death. As it will be observed in both the novel and its film adaptation it can be also noticed that the representation of Ophelia does not correspond to a madwoman but an empowered character whose decisions are solid and determined.

Two Mediums in Accordance

The dialogue between poetry and painting has been identified since ancient times and it has occupied the scope of study for many scholars. This interaction, which is known under the name of *ut pictura poesis*, has divided the opinion of several critics and artists. For instance, we have previously mentioned Leonardo Da Vinci's views on such matters in his *Paragone of Painting*. Others such as the German philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing considered that painting and poetry might be treated as separate artistic disciplines. Nevertheless, we have to go further in this argument considering another concept that is crucial to understand this paper. We have to take into account the backward process of ekphrasis, known as reverse ekphrasis and is described as the visual representation of a written work. At the other extreme, Garret Stewart defines it as "the visual representation of a verbal representation" (89). Therefore, when we are examining how literary texts are transferred from one medium to another, it is necessary not to thrust aside the fact that the target visual text, having originated through reverse ekphrasis, ought to be dealt with both in terms of their artistic greatness and in terms of their conditions as transpositions of literary source texts. Notwithstanding the debate between the different opinions about poetry and painting, it might be argued that neither of both disciplines is superior to the other since what the poem offers is a written description of a piece of art. By contrast, the painting offers the visual description of that poem and it may fill some gaps that were not displayed to the extent of providing additional details. In Wendy Steiner's argument, ekphrasis represents the verbal equivalent of the "pregnant moment" in art, where "a poem aspires to the timeless eternity of the stopped-action painting". (13-14) When we discuss temporality, it is essential to understand the "pregnant moment" of an action since it is the arrested point which indicates what came before and what will follow. Time and space are unified visually in art and their qualities are complementary. Jeoraldan McClain suggests that "[exemplifying] this point we have only to remark that Lessing's polarization of literature and painting in *Laocoon* resulted from a confusion of the sister arts in the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*" (45). At this point, I would like to add Claus Clüver's definition who reformulated the description of ekphrasis, as he writes "the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a nonverbal sign" (32). He highlighted that both the representing and the represented text may be no artistic, that the represented text may belong to an extensive range of media types, and that the represented text may be fictitious. In this way, he has managed to provide a definition that covers all kinds of ekphrastic objects, whether they be actual or imagined, visual or auditory, artistic or mundane.

The significance of Klein's novel is worthy to remark within the current trend of pictorial intertextuality springs from the fact that the novel later results in the making of a film adaptation. Considering the interaction between word and image, it is worthy to quote McFarlane and Hutcheon on their vision of adaptation as a way to explain how both mediums interact in the film *Ophelia*:

According to the fidelity approach, the resulting target text mainly performs asort of 'copying' of the source text, adaptations that explicitly deviate from the original should be reconsidered in terms of "offering a commentary on or, in more extreme cases, a deconstruction ... of the original." (22)

Linda Hutcheon in her *Theory of Adaptation*, asserts that an adaptation may be regarded "as a creative and interpretative transposition of a recognizable other work or works", which comes to be perceived as "a kind of extended palimpsest" requiring a "transcoding into a different set of conventions" (Hutcheon 33). Klein's novel, which was adapted into a movie in 2018, is also a fine example of intertextuality, specifically pictorial intertextuality since it features the Pre-Raphaelites with images of Ophelia. Klein's novel is the source material for Claire McCarthy's film of the same title (2018). Notwithstanding the fact that the film recounts Hamlet's story, it is Ophelia who is given to agency to tell her own point of view "[giving] greater complexity to her as a three-dimensional character, formerly only limited, subordinate, and tragic" (Ue 208). As Claire McCarthy admits,

[her] intention is for this retelling to give much more dimension and gravitas to Ophelia than she was afforded in Shakespeare's original story. It is my hope that an audience can re-experience the Hamlet that they know and love with added delight and whimsy due to the shift of the narrative axis. (208)

Lavinia Hulea reflects on McFarlane and Hutcheon's arguments considering

[A] target text relying on a literary source text must reinterpret the source text and not only reproduce it, their theoretical approach differs in terms of alteration of the source text: where McFarlane sees the target text as entirely different, Hutcheon implies that the source text continues to be recognizable within the target text. (3)

Therefore, Klein's intertextual dialogue with Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and its film adaptation of that dialogue by the film industry, hints at a complex process of pictorial-filmic intertextuality. As Lara argues, "the idea that intertextuality should be restricted to purely textual works [...] attest to this renewed interest in the creative possibilities of aesthetic cross-fertilisation" (97). In order to demonstrate this, Shakespeare's text produces two dialogues that are in accordance: first, this text is transformed into images leading to the Pre-Raphaelite's paintings, while Lisa Klein's novels, among others, are told from Ophelia's perspective through the concept of interfigurality. We can observe that Shakespeare's text produces two dialogues that are in accordance: first, this text is transformed into images leading to the Pre-Raphaelite's paintings, while Lisa Klein's novel is told from Ophelia's perspective through interfigurality. The mediums of image and word then are combined into creating another image, since Klein's text and the aforementioned Pre-Raphaelite paintings are incorporated into a film adaptation. Thus, Claire McCarthy's film is based on both Lisa Klein's Ophelia and some Pre-Raphaelite paintings. It can be argued that we got a different Ophelia since the film produces two Ophelias that are simultaneously static and dynamic. On the one hand, the one offered by Klein is dynamic since she gradually evolves from the very beginning of the story and her transition empowers her to the extent that she orchestrates her own "suicide". On the other hand, Ophelia's Millais is static as the canvas reproduces such scene in which there is no possibility to discern what drove her to end up in such state. It is however interesting to consider the following question: Which Ophelia is introduced in the film? It can be observed that every time Ophelia is placed in a different setting and a distinct medium she is transformed due to the changes and limitations of each medium. Klein's book shows Ophelia becoming Mechtild's apprentice, during which she honed her flowers expertise she displays in the original play. The potion, which that recreates death, and mocks it at the same time, is given to Ophelia by Mechtild, enabling Ophelia to fake suicide and survive beyond Shakespeare's "muddy death". For this reason, it is worthy to remark how Ophelia recounts her suicide in Klein novel and this scene is offered in the film adaptation:

I tried to feel the potion working. Nothing happened yet. I sought some pleasant sensation, a comforting memory, but felt only growing panic. Suddenly I feared the coming oblivion. [...] My breath grew short as terror rose in me. I pushed against the earth, trying to stand, and found my fingers tangled among the cool, waxy leaves of the mallow plant that clung to the marshy verges of the river. [...] The branch bent under my weight as if delivering me to the deep, and I murmured, "I come to you, waters of death and life. Take me from this world of madness and strife." (Klein 135)



Ophelia, Claire McCarthy (2018). Courtesy: *Vogue*.

Considering this latter idea we can observe that this scene is placed at the very beginning of the film. It does not follow a linear sequence with a clear beginning, climax, and conclusion. In lieu of this, it offers a circular structure introducing “Ophelia’s suicide”, or what we know about her and by using flashbacks and flash-forwards we are given details about her previous life prior meeting Hamlet and the events that follow her suicide. For that reason, she utters the following quote to anticipate the viewer “You think you may know my story [...] But I was always a wilful girl and followed my heart and spoke my mind. And it is high time I should tell you my story myself” (00:01:03) (fig. 2). It can be assumed that the way Ophelia introduces from such point intends to offer what led her to arrange her death. For that reason, the novel is placed in St Emilion and recounts what happened to her after her “alleged drowning”.

Conclusions

In light of this analysis, the detailed evocation of Millais’s painting in this passage has its counterpoint in this scene of the film, which offers a close-up of Ophelia “floating” in the river that turns the verbal visualisation in Klein’s novel back to the primary visual form of the original picture and Gertrude’s description in *Hamlet*. In this context, the treatment of the major Pre-Raphaelite referent for both novel and film stands as a clear example of the process whereby Klein’s narrative and its film version portray a journey through Pre-Raphaelite artistic universe that reveals the rich interaction between word and image.

Asides from that, the characteristics and limitations of each medium play a significant role. Interfigural and ekphrastic dialogue aims to differentiate Shakespeare’s Ophelia from the later representations of her in Pre-Raphaelite painting and British contemporary fiction. Secondly, Pre-Raphaelite paintings are seen as a visual reading of Shakespeare’s source text through reverse ekphrasis, while Lisa Klein’s novel is told from Ophelia’s perspective through interfigurality.

And last but not least, Klein’s intertextual dialogue with Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and its film adaptation hint a complex process of pictorial-filmic intertextuality. In order to demonstrate this, Shakespeare’s text produces two dialogues that are in accordance: first, this text is transformed into images leading to the Pre-Raphaelite’s paintings, while Lisa Klein’s novel, among others, is told from Ophelia’s perspective through the concept of interfigurality. As we have observed, Shakespeare’s text produces two dialogues that are in accordance: first, this text is transformed into images leading to Millais’s painting while Lisa Klein’s novel is told from Ophelia’s perspective through interfigurality. The mediums of image and word then are combined into creating another image, since Klein’s text and the aforementioned painting are both incorporated into a film adaptation.

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Gestures Without Words, Words Without Gestures: Ethnographic Artists as Translators

SALLY T.N. SHAO

Abstract: In this essay, I am going to examine the aesthetic expression in transcultural artworks using a diasporic social groups' representational perspective based on the consideration of social identity. In this investigation, I consider a sense-to-sense visual translation as a method of cultural interpretation by analysing four Chinese Contemporary ethnographic artworks in a circular narration manner. Actively consider the re-narration and reconstruction from the word-to-word literature in international dialogues, the misunderstanding, and the untranslatable of the cultural representation reality into the account. The artistic expression acts as a continuous dialogue of diaspora identity and an invitation to further communications that are out of the motherland.

Keywords: Identity, representation, diaspora, artistic expression, cultural translation

Introduction

“This representation of hidden significance through an embryonic attempt at making it visible is of singular a nature that it is rarely met within the sphere of non-linguistic life.” (Benjamin, 255)

In this essay, I am going to examine the aesthetic expression in transcultural artworks using a diasporic social group's representational perspective. By taking the realm of translation and representation of social identity into the account, I am focusing on cultural translation as a reconstruction in the pre-existed narration of the word-to-word literature. Whereas in this investigation, I consider a sense-to-sense visual translation as a method of cultural interpretation. Under this condition, I will analyse four artworks in a circular narration manner. To start with, I will examine *Asian Field* (2003) by British sculptor Antony Gormley which is currently showing in the Hong Kong M+ Museum with a notion of 'standing on shared ground: the ethos behind'; following with Chinese Contemporary artist Wang Gongxin's *Swinging Grey* (2021) and *Dialogue* (1995) in the show 'In-Between' of London White Cube in 2021 as a reading under an emerging transcultural condition. Lastly, the *Round Table – Side by Side* (1997) by Chinese Contemporary artist Chen Zhen will be taken into consideration for international dialogues, the misunderstanding, and the untranslatable of the cultural representation reality. This essay acts as a dialogue of diaspora identity and an invitation to further communications that are out of the motherland.

Artistic Expression as a Cultural Representation

In *The Task of Translator* (1923), Benjamin put forward a fundamental premise that “translation is a form” (Benjamin, 255). In the discussion of the concept of 'form', he further raised a response that “the appreciation of a work of art or an art form” (Benjamin, 253), by which means translation does not act as a secondary derivative of art in a literary sense but an artist expression itself. The form of translation is distinct from machine translation, instead, Benjamin metaphorically declared translation is an afterlife of the original source which “could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living” (Benjamin, 256) undergoing a change. Hereby, translation is being seen as a 'living thing; thus, to think about translation is to contemplate the logic of the 'living

thing'. By definition, living thing "pertains to any organism or life form that possesses or shows the characteristics of life or being alive" (Plochmann, 1953) which coincide with the characteristics of requiring energy, adapting to the surrounding environment, responding to stimuli, and having an organised structure. To think in the logic of a 'living thing', there is a necessity to scrutinise the condition of life and death. For a living thing to live within its lifespan is thinking in a singular implication, whereas to think in a social plurality sense is to investigate the passing of 'generations'. In a literal translation, the living force will be going through a re-'generation' in a word-to-word consideration; whereas in the realm of the intangible cultural translation, the consideration of sense-to-sense will be taken into account. There is an inextricable relationship between language as a 'living thing', based on the premise in the mental entity of human beings "communicate itself in language and not through language" (Benjamin, 315).

To declare an inherent relationship between languages and living things is essential to progress a further discussion on ethnographic artwork as a representation of transcultural identity. The reason for analysing artistic expression as a form of cultural representation is to articulate intangible feelings which could only be transmitted in a sense-to-sense simulation. Benjamin expressed his argument on visual representation accordingly, "this representation of hidden significance through an embryonic attempt at making it visible is of singular a nature that it is rarely met within the sphere of non-linguistic life" (Benjamin, 255). Based on the above premises, I will analyse the below artworks in a sense-to-sense gesture which I focus on the translation as a language 'form' of its literal content.

Standing on a Shared Land: The Ethos Beyond the Field of Asian

Anthony Gormley (b.1950) is an international British sculptor, known for his installations and sculptures that dwell in the relationship of space and human physical bodies. Gormley expansively connects the feelings of empathy and universality, reflecting the forms of existence that transform in temporalities, cultures, and places. In 2003, Gormley created a huge scale installation piece *Asian Field* which approximately includes 200,000 clay figures that encapsulate the concept of collective ethos. In Gormley's installation series of Field, *Asian Field* (2003) is the sixth field that corresponds to the previous. Between 1991 to 1993, Gormley created the previous five fields which are *Field (American)* (1991), *Amazonian Field* (1992), *European Field* (1993), *Field for the British Isles* (1993) and *Horizon Field* (2003). Regarding the previous fields, *Asian Field* (2003) acts as an Asia voice to stand its ground in a shared land knowing the large population in China, contemplating the rapid growth of popularity in China. The joint effort of a British artist and engages individuals in the Chinese community to allow the installation to step on a transcultural stage. The material of the clay starts with the vital elements in the earth, which are minerals, water, and sand then transformed the shape through hand contact by a huge group of people. Each person was supplied with a lump of soil,



Fig. 1. Gormley, *Asian Field* (2003)

a pencil for engraving eyes, and a water container. Every clay maker was allowed to improvise freely under three simple guidelines: 1. Each sculpture should be hand-scaled; 2. Able to stand on its own; 3. Two eyes are facing the front and looking above the horizon.

Accordingly, *Asian Field* (2003) raised three existential questions for the makers and audiences to reflect on their representational identity by asking – "what are we", "where do we come from", and "where are we going"? (Hong Kong M+ Museum) It offers a sincere dialogue in artistic collaboration, body contacts, and communal co-production

between the makers and the viewers. Inviting more than 300 people from Guangdong Province (Thaddaeus Ropac) to make more than 200,000 clay sculptures exude two main implications, which created a joint message from the Chinese community to formulate a collective force and represents a huge overpopulation reality showcased through the vast territory. See Fig. 1, the eyes of human clay figures that are looking up to the sky, as if the figures are contemplating, exploring, and thinking about the development of humanity. All the clay makers were not invited to participate according to their age; thus, hundreds of villagers will be across three generations. Gathering the villagers to be equally participated irregardless of age limits and immersed in the clay-shaping experience. It carries a notion of ethos that passes through generations from grandparents to parents, and parents to their children. The artistic expression captured the transmission of language like the transmission of seeds, as Benjamin mentioned in *On Language as Such and On the Language of Man* (1916) “from one language into another through a continuum of transformations” (Benjamin, 70). Through the same instructions, 200,000 handful clay figures are created in a transformation gesture and a continuum of change by the transitions of human contact. The idea of artistic expression as a portrayal of language is resonating with Gormley’s thoughts in his early creation life, that he once said:

“I used to think that the great thing about sculpture was that, like Stonehenge, it was something that stood against time in an adamant way, and was an absolute mass in space. Now I try to use the language of architecture to redescribed the body as a place.” (Anthony, 16)

The eye of the hand-sized figures are looking upon the sky is translated into architectures that stand still with the Chinese language in its bodies. They become bodies that are able to transmit the meaning in language. In Benjamin’s definition of ‘translation’ is a “living thing” (Benjamin, 256) that will not end its life hinging on a particular viewer. It has its own time and space to transform into something new. In Chinese saying, that is a *qi* cosmology that sets out as the traditional Chinese culture interpretative context. *Qi*, which is known as a vital energy that permeates the universe that has to do with air and breathing. It is a crucial element for a living thing that resonates with the necessary existence of water, minerals, and sand in the earth. In Gormley’s interpretation, the physical body “is not a subject but rather an instrument he uses to ‘investigate how his own conscious experience [sensation, emotion, thought] occurs in the physical world’ “ (M+ Museum). The construction of each clay figure becomes ‘an instrument’ to scrutinise the interconnection of the makers and the makers’ perceived world, i.e. China. It inherently owns a tendency to perform as a vessel for its consciousness, feelings, and memories. The exploration of the inherent self and the existential condition of being-with-the-world.

With all heads up to the sky, it represents society’s busy interactions and performing the lack of distance between individuals. During the time of artwork making in 2003, China was implementing the One-Child policy that had been long started in 1980 and ended in 2016. Mullen (2021) indicated that the policy was strictly imposed with punishment including forced abortion and violators’ fines as a measure to control the rapid growth of the population and resources distribution. Reflecting the critical atmosphere in the society during that time, actively conveys the idea of meaning transmission through a clay reproduction manner; it further reflects in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) that “history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains aftereffects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard – that is, a new art form” (118). The *Asian Field* (2003) opens a discussion beyond the ‘Asian’ narratives, but a social engagement with Gormley as an international artist to include a cross-cultural encounter for ‘the other’ in the contemporary art scene; highly concerns the matter of ethos, national identity, and cultural authenticity of the nation. Serving as a representation method to anticipate and intimate to reach a realisation of cultural identity, reversing the normal rhythm of artwork and the conventional art gaze. The *Asian Field* (2003) marks as a homecoming; letting Chinese soil return to its land, asking for shared responsibility in the future. The clay sculptures stand on the shared ground with all the Chinese villagers, the intimate and authentic hand-to-hand contacts reconstructed the universal soil into its own custom, origin, and territory.

'In-Between' the Liminal Land of the East and the West

The state of 'in-between' is a state of liminality; liminal spaces, acknowledge as a state of transition. The word 'liminal' is transformed from *limens* in Latin, which implies a meaning of 'threshold' – namely "a place of transition, waiting, and unknowing" (Ali, 4). It is in the situation of being caught between two worlds, leaving the known world and going to another. To think in the liminal does not implicate a paralysis state; instead, it examines the both notion of the unfixed and the fixed, generating a constantly shifting memory and idea. It is interesting to contemplate the 'in-between' identity on the subjects of migration and translation, which is to consider the nature of all. Migration refers to the "movement from one part of something to another" (Oxford Dictionary), whilst translation means "the process of moving something from one place to another" (Oxford Dictionary). Migration is seeking movement in a geographical sense while translation is inspecting its position in the domain of language. The former is moving from a familiar territory to an unfamiliar land, reversely, translation is converting the unfamiliar language into the familiar. The relationship between translation and migration is in a reversion contrast; however, they are also exchanging in one thing which is the nature of transition – breaking through the liminal space.

In 2022, Chinese artist Wang Gongxin was showing numerous installations in the London Mason's Yard White Cube under the title of *'In-Between'* in response to his transcultural identity reflection. Through his experience as an ethnographic artist that moved from China to the United States in the late 1980s (White Cube), Wang started to formulate a synthesis by reconciling two different regions. Influenced by Japanese writer Tanizaki Junichiro's essay *In the Praise of Shadows* (1993), the two different perspectives on the matter of light that has drawn Wang's interest to further explore the essence of cultural identities. In *In the Praise of Shadows* (1993), Tanizaki raised a conflict between a cultural foundation of westernisation versus orientalism, comparing the traditional and the progression of modernity by elucidating the sphere of skin colour, construction, architecture, paper, painting, etc. Tanizaki wrote the comparison of light and shadow romantically, "cutting off the light from this empty space they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth superior to that of any wall painting or ornament" (20-21). The 'empty space' is what he sees metaphorically said as a shadow, full of 'mystery' that the dim shadow could possibly surpass all the ornaments. Tanizaki's thoughts on the cultural perspective on light is undoubtedly an influential piece for Wang's creation. Wang further carries on this cultural consciousness and investigates the matter of shadow and light which East Asian culture is embracing the subtle and shadow, while the West culture is searching for illumination. The complexity of adapting new forms of living aroused a new perception, and the way of seeing colours was one of them. The journey of the East [i.e. China] and the West [i.e. United States] is a perceptual journey in the colour black, grey, and white

in Wang's artistic expression. It is in a liminal of cultural adaption, searching for a cultural translation in a 'new mundane' living environment.

Wang presented the installation *Swinging Grey* (2021) in the exhibition *'In-Between'*, it is a kinetic installation that explores the changeable and indeterminate conditions of both perceptual and physical. See Fig. 2, there are two three-dimensional glowing light bulbs are hanging down from the ceiling, both inserted with a video camera. They swing across two pools of water, one dyed in white and another pigmented in black. The surrounding environment was

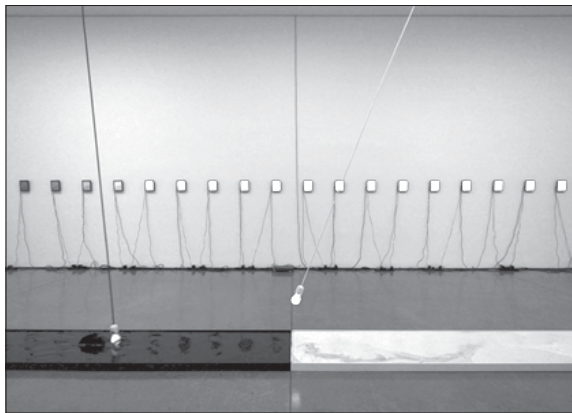


Fig. 2. Wang Gongxin, *Swinging Grey* (2021)

illuminated when the light bulbs were skimming across the pools. The camera so to capture the instant moment of one's tiny amount of colour splashing to the another and merging with 'the other'. The activity of liquid exchange of the adjacent water has delivered a notion of ownership, change, stability, the perceived and the perceiver. The authority of colour has been taken away at an exceedingly slow pace, but eventually black and white will be combined into two pools of grey; no one will remain unchanged in its colour. There is a multi-state between colour shades, that a certain definition of identity would no longer serve, but the flow and flux of an inter-dependent transformation of one land to another.

In *The Task of the Translator*, Benjamin (1923) has replied on the reciprocal relationship in languages, that "it cannot possibly reveal or establish this hidden relationship itself; but it can represent it by realising it in the embryonic or intensive form" (118). In the "hidden relationship" of languages, which hereby the 'language' is expressed as the distinction of colour, and what drives into the "hidden relationship" is what Benjamin called the 'kinship of language'. The 'kinship of language' that he mentioned is differ from the traditional imagination of mother language nor the likeness between languages; accordingly, it is not the discussion on the likeness of colours in *Swinging Grey* (2021). What Benjamin is discussing about it actually all the languages are intending to do the same thing; "all supra-historical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a wholean intention"(72) which is to develop a relationship with the world around them. The colour black and white in *Swinging Grey* (2021) appears as a contrast as well as a visual dependency, the blackness is making the whiteness formulates as a whole, so as the reverse. The representation of identity is performed in various forms of gesture that do not set off the medium to present. In the word per-form, etymologically, per- implies "through" or "by means of" (Oxford Dictionary). Thus, by saying perform is to say 'through the means of' form. Whether by linguistic forms in word-to-word or artistic expression in the visual form are also recognised as means that drive towards to ultimate goal – that is to develop a relationship with the world around you.

In the liminal space of diasporic identity, there is a cultural gesture of loss and gain, promise and disappointment. Gaining more of the opposite pool is also losing the equal amount of liquid in your own land to progress on the cultural exchange. During the exchange activity of the 'greyness', there consists a certain degree of hidden risk. The metaphorical value of light bulbs and water not only serves as the translation ground but also a bear of risk with the explosive dangers of water and electricity. Only an equal amount of water exchange would sustain a balanced water level for both pools. Thus, to ensure a moderate level of water and electricity contact, which acts as a reminder in the air of globalisation, and a potential warning of the cultural erosion and monopoly taking place.

From Square to Round: The Eternal Misunderstanding

Dining Table, implied a sense of family union that associates with gathering and discussion. The space of the dining room is seen a stage of everyday family drama, unfolding daily interactions with the people that you have developed intimacy with. It establishes connection and communication between the family members as a reaffirmation of family identity. Responsively, Japanese writer Fumiko has delicately suggested in *The House Without a Dining Table* (1979) that the dining table is "the plight and the sentiment of the disjointed family" (Fumiko, 140), each table functions as a unit for the family to eat together in order to formulate as a symbol of a 'familiar togetherness'; it additionally emphasises that the dining table is the best indicator of the emotional and natural content of family relations. To contemplate the discussion on a dining table in a transcultural context is to think about formulating a 'negotiation' through discussions.

The table entails a temporality of human interactions and dialogues from the passage of time; in the case of Wang's concern that will be a constant conversation between the East and the West, carry on his metaphorical black and white colour as dimmed shadows and glowing illumination respectively. *Dialogue* (1995) is another installation work in the 'In-Between', made with a rectangular

wooden table, metal water container and motor. Entering the first room of the 'In-Between' just as entering the living room, *Dialogue* (1995) is the first piece that catches your attention in a quiet way. The whirring discussion between lightbulbs is continuous on a long metal table holding black pigmented water that overflows all over the table's surface (see Fig. 3). Two lightbulbs are hanging down from the motorised machine at the ceiling, slowly dipped into the black ink before it rises reversely again. Soft and calm ripples are created that precariously pressurise the water towards the edge of the table. The movement of two lightbulbs is as a Chinese idiom "dragonfly touches the water (qīng tíng diǎn shuǐ)" (Tang, 440), specifically speaking, it should be "dragonfly skimming over the water surface and light touching it (from time to time)" (Tang, 440). In Chinese culture, the dragonfly carries a meaning of transformation, opportunity, and adaptability while the action of the 'dragonfly touches water' denotes a superficial but lack of deep understanding. The dialectic duality of the black table and two lightbulbs in *Dialogue* (1995) performs as the shadow of the East and the illumination of the West. Positioning the action of 'touching water' is reflecting the tension of cultural understanding, and resonances with the risk of *Swinging Grey* (2021) between the resisting nature of water and electricity.

The colour narration is coinciding with *In the Praise of Shadow* (1993) that "the cleanliness of what can be seen only calls up more clearly thoughts of what cannot be seen. In such places the distinction between the clean and unclean is best left obscure, shrouded in a dusky haze" (5). The depth of ink has drawn on the cultural density, beyond the surface of 'dragonfly touches water' to a historical reference as Tanizaki commented,

"the ink would not have been this bluish colour but rather black, something like India ink, and it would have even made to seep down from the handle into the brush" (8). The profundity has concealed the hidden language of a culture, lingering between the fragments of the revealed and the concealed of reality. In the encounter of international politics, there is a potential of cultural translation that a certain aspect of meaning is irresistibly losing its way. The customs, gestures, and interaction body languages are to a certain extent untranslatable through a word-to-word structure. Through

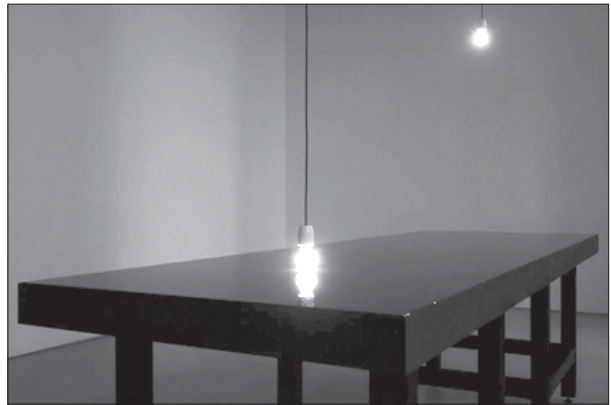


Fig. 3. Wang Gongxin, *Dialogue* (1995)

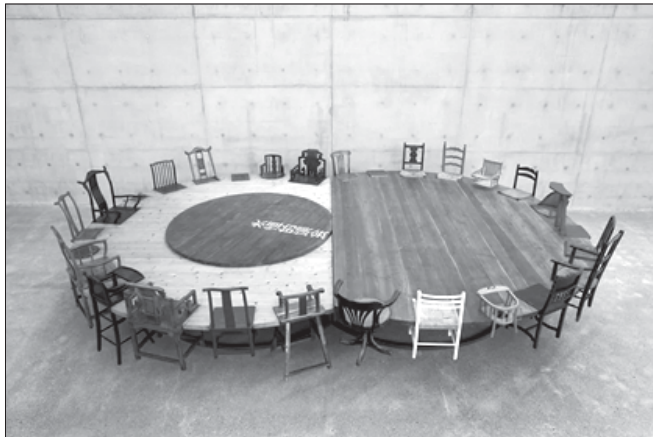


Fig. 4. Chen Zhen. *Round Table – Side by Side* (1997)

the immersive feeling from a visual simulation, the meaning has reunion as a whole, finding its losing fragments to reform a new understanding and narration. To talk about cultural translation is concerning more than a matter of linguistic structure. Culture critic Boris Buden (2006) asserted that cultural translation transcends "a purely linguistic horizon and becomes a cultural and political phenomenon" that "provokes on reader's side a certain feeling of strangeness, impression that they are confronted with something foreign" (Translate Eipcp). In the

liminal of 'greyness', there exudes a fear of alienation between two territories – the colour white, and the colour black. Imaginatively attack the formidable cultural barriers, at the same time open a liminal space as a bridge for different territories.

To contemplate on the cultural structure is to think about the shape of culture, in the context of a square table or a round table could contain. The *Round Table – Side by Side* (1997) is constructed by Chinese-French conceptual artist Chen Zhen, created with 28 different styles of found chairs over two massive round tables to emblem an international leaders' enactment and meeting (M+ Museum). There is a turntable on one of the tables, bearing the concept of sharing in Chinese eating culture; the turntable is boldly engraved 'eternal misunderstanding'. The two round tables are connected under an implication of different cultures' emergence. The roundness of the table metaphorically represents as unity, wholeness, and harmony, wishing the conversations on the round table are a harmonic pleasure. In 1950, Mao Zedong has introduced the law of Agrarian Reform (Moorhouse, 2022). The implementation of this law has made the private ownership of land into a shared mechanism, the atmosphere of collectivisation was strongly promoted. The round shape entails a notion of collective sharing and roundtable talks, of whether thinking in a square table and round table or different designs of chairs are composing a dialogue structure of the 'cultural negotiation'. Although with the cooperation of two round tables, the 28 mismatched chairs are hinting a fundamental non-negotiable that every seat implies a different perspective of seeing. In Chen's exile experience, he began to be aware of the shocking cultural differences in the void betwixt the West and the East. In the journey of migration, he tried to create a connection between different cultural forms of knowledge in the two societies' structures.

By transforming the intangible codes of language into tangible chair forms, *Round Table – Side by Side* (1997) has revealed the fundamental divergence of chair designs, that is the construction of social structures. The motto of this artwork 'eternal misunderstanding' was engraved on the table as a reminder to the viewers, bearing the promise and disappointment of cultural exchange and the irresistible untranslatable. Each found chair is seen as a representation of identity, such as a mediation chair, a high table chair, etc. Undoubtedly, there must be an identity of the mediation chair that the high table chair fails to achieve, or the function of children's chair would never be completable with a wheelchair. The aim of showcasing differences is not to compare one better than the other, but an acknowledgement of an 'eternal misunderstanding' to overcome across geographical limits. *Round Table – Side by Side* (1997) represents a connotation of unity and conversation between cultures; however, the chair style differences interrupt the connotations, losing a clear unity that we are accustomed to. The lostness of language is a diaspora condition which our bodies are living inside, in a space where we are perpetually lost. The expression disability is a form of cultural dyslexia which differ from amnesia, it is not a forgotten memory but an embracement and reminder of the unknown.

From a table with four edges and shape angles to a table with one shared curve, the roundtable talk united a various of diversities in ethnic, religious, linguistic, and ideological to overcome our differences. It further raised a question – does negotiation requires a complete understanding? The answer could be answered in the implication of cultural translation that Buden (2006) stated, to think in cultural translation is not "facilitate the communication between two different languages and cultures"; instead, it is "building one's own language – build the nation" (Translate Eipcp). The differences of the chairs 'side by side' one and another is not viewing as an eternal comparison, but to make a connection though the non-resemblance. In order to accomplish that one must learn from the other to advance your own culture; therefore, to build one's own language, and eventually the nation. The cultural difference created a distant glimmer, a potential glow is an identity transformation that requires a time of waiting and exploring to reveal the hidden gems in language.

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A Comparative Study of Images in Chinese-English Translation of Red Classics: A Manipulation Theory Perspective

YANG XU

Abstract: China initiated large-scale translation of domestic literature into foreign languages after its founding, indicating another significant translation wave in its history. Under the combined influence of domestic and international environments, literary translation activities during that special period were subject prominently to external factors such as ideology and patrons. The manipulation theory, focusing on the influence of ideology, poetics and patronage on translation, provides a new perspective for the studies in this field. In view of this, the paper focuses on the shaping of images in C-E translation of Chinese red classic novels published by Foreign Languages Press for a comparative analysis. It discovers that translators, compelled by ideological factors, would resort to various skills including amplification, shift, and rewriting to achieve the intended publicity purposes, and suggests that external factors such as ideology and patronage should be taken into account in literary translation studies.

Keywords: Ideology, literary translation, red classics, manipulation

1. Introduction

Translation as cultural exchange activity is never carried out in a vacuum. It is always confined and influenced by various internal and external factors including history, society, culture, and politics, rather than simple personal activities or purely linguistic phenomena. However, traditional translation theories have long focused on the linguistic comparison between source languages and target languages. The manipulation theory, represented by André Lefevere, introduces such concepts as ideology, poetics, and patronage into translation studies, pointing out that literary translation is the rewriting of the source text under the influence of mainstream ideology and poetics. This provides a new perspective for translation studies, for it no longer confines translation studies to linguistic aspects, but examines them under a grander view of history, society, culture, politics, etc.

After the founding of New China, especially before the reform and opening up, Chinese literature creation and translation went through a special historical period, and literary works in those years, including translations, were inevitably marked with the ideology of the times. This has attracted the attention of many scholars, but in general, the concerned studies are mostly macroscopic researches (e.g., Zha, 2004; Xie, 2009), and focus primarily on foreign-to-Chinese translations (e.g., Fang, 2003; Liao, 2017). The research in this regard in Western academic circles is also far from enough (Fisac, 2012:135), and existing studies look into such translations more as social documents for understanding China than as literary works (Goldblatt, 2010:7; Harman, 2006:15). In view of this, this paper intends to concentrate on the C-E translation of works published by Foreign Languages Press in Beijing as examples, with the hope to explore the influence of ideology on literary translation activities based on textual analysis.

2. Methodology: Manipulation Theory

Theo Hermans points out that “from the point of view of target literature, all translation implied a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose” (1985:11). He incorporates “manipulation” into translation research paradigms, which is regarded as the prototype of the manipulation school. The standard-bearer of this school is the Belgian-American scholar André Lefevre. In *Translation, History and Culture: A Sourcebook*, he argues that translation is not simple language conversion, but subject to a series of conditions, including ideology, patronage, cultural systems, etc. Of the many constraints, the one from language is the least important (Lefevre, 2004: iii). In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* published in 1992, he combines translation studies with power, ideology, patronage and poetics on the basis of extensive textual analysis, fully expounding his thoughts in a systematical way.

Translation is rewriting, which constitutes the core difference between manipulation theory and other translation theories. Lefevre believes that patronage and poetics are the two elements that influence translation. The literary system exerts its influences through both internal and external means. The former involves professionals inclusive of critics, commentators, teachers, translators, etc., whose focus is on the conformity of literature rewriting to mainstream ideologies (the views and attitudes generally accepted in a certain society at a certain time) and poetics. The latter refers mainly to patrons, which can be individuals or institutions that have the “power”. Patrons pay more attention to ideology than poetics (Lefevre, 2010:15). Generally, patrons are responsible for checking the ideology, while professionals are responsible for the gatekeeping of poetics. Both ideology and poetics are the major factors that influence literary translation, and the former is generally given greater priority of the two, since it not only determines the selection of texts to be translated, but also guides the translation strategies and problem-solving tactics. Therefore, manipulation theory provides a unique perspective to observe translation activities, and enriches the dimensions of translation studies.

3. Creation and Translation of Red Classics

To study translation from the perspective of ideology is mainly to examine translation phenomena in specific historical and cultural contexts (Liu, 2012:112). For a long time after the founding of New China, the political considerations of literary works took precedence over their literariness due to the influence of various factors at home and abroad. The literary works created and translated during this period inevitably were imbued with the political air and the mindset of the public at that time. Against this backdrop, national organizations, institutions and various publishing agencies reflecting national ideology, as the largest patrons of literary translation, imposed obvious influence on source material selection and translation process. The invisible hand of external forces influenced not only what should and should not be translated, but also how.

Translators were not completely “free”, and instead they must comply with the requirements of relevant authorities and institutions. They had no right to choose works, but were only commissioned to translate, and therefore literary translation was generally regarded as a political task (Zhang, 2008:101). An obvious feature of the politicization of literature and its translation is that many works and translations are accompanied by “prefaces”, “notes”, “postscripts” and other introductory words in order to “guide” the reader’s understanding direction. As Yang Mo, the author of *Song of Youth*, writes in her “Postscript”:

I would like to tell my readers sincerely: During my entire childhood and youth, I lived in the dark society under the rule of the Kuomintang, and suffered oppression, persecution, loss of schooling and unemployment, and that life was deeply imprinted on my life. In my heart, I always had the desire to complain. However, in those dark desperate days, I was fortunate enough to meet the Party. It was the Party who saved me, made me see in despair the light and the promising future

of human beings. It was the Party who gave me a real life, and gave me the courage and strength to survive the long and brutal warring years, and finally become a member of the revolutionists... This gratitude and this deep feeling became the original basis of the novel. [My translation]

In the “Postscript to the Second Edition”, she wrote, “... to let the readers see the misery of the peasant life at that time and the evil of the landlord class...”. The “Postscript to the New Edition” mentions that “there are also young writers saying that *Song of Youth* is a work that ‘expresses established concepts’... I can only adhere to my creation with a heart that is loyal to the motherland, the people, and the communism.”

The literariness of works and their translations have been lessened to a certain extent over this special period, while the influence of ideology had been strengthened unprecedentedly. During this period, the influence of ideology on literary creation and translation also became particularly prominent, and literary translation adhered to a clear purpose, that is, “serving the revolution and serving literary creation” (Xu, 2002:64). As Xie claims, compared with local creative literature, ideology seems to impose greater and more direct constraints on literary translation (2009:30). Therefore, the literary translation of this period has become a “living fossil” providing excellent opportunities to probe into the influence of ideology on literary translation. The following section will focus on the images in C-E translations of red classics to explore how ideology and other external considerations influence literary translations through a comparative analysis.

4. A Case Study of Images in Red Classics and Their English Translations

French scholar Antoine Berman asserts that translation strategies are choices made under the impact of ideology (as cited in Wang, 2003:17). In other words, literary translation, as a contrived system, is no exception and always subject to the ideology over a particular historical period. In order to meet the requirements of ideology, translators oftentimes adopt certain strategies and means to strengthen or weaken specific elements.

As one of the three publishing agencies for the dissemination of English versions of Chinese literary works in the last century, Foreign Languages Press had very close relationships with the Chinese government (Li & Liu, 2016:31). Since its establishment in 1952, it had been a subordinate agency of the State Publishing Administration. Its business policy was led by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The English translations of *Song of Youth* and other novels selected in this paper as representatives of the times were all published by Foreign Languages Press. Some scholars contend that these works “expressed established concepts”. It is undeniable that the works of this period have varying degrees of publicity and didactic purposes. As Yin and Fang suggest, the purpose of literary translation is to defend and build socialism for a long period of time after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (Yin, 2009:13; Fang, 2003:109). On the one hand, they aim at celebrating the glorious deeds of the communists, revolutionaries and the masses of the people, or the superiority of the socialist system, etc. On the other, they are also meant to exposing the despicability of reactionary forces such as the Kuomintang, the landlords or the Japanese invaders. Interestingly, to serve the above-mentioned purposes, the translation would occasionally betray the source work. In view of this, this paper intends to conduct a comparative study of images in these works and their English translations, in order to explore the influence of ideology on literary translating process.

4.1 Building-up of Positive Images

Amplification

Example 1.

ST: “党的纪律——服从，绝对服从！……”他心里叨念着，又沉思了一会儿，然后迈起大步走到人群里面去(Yang, 2004:125)。

TT: "Party discipline!" he muttered. "Instructions are given for a purpose. They must be obeyed."
After some reflection, he strode into the crowd (Yang, 1996:137).

In Example 1, the unconditional imperative “党的纪律——服从，绝对服从” (literally: Party discipline—obedience, absolute obedience!) emphasizes the obedience of the individual to the organization, which is a distinctive feature of oriental collectivism. If this is literally translated into Western culture where individualism prevails, it may not be well accepted by readers, and even probably create a totalitarian and unreasonable image among target readers, which is contrary to the intention of literary translation at that time. Therefore, in order to better enhance publicity purpose and readers' acceptance, a causal explanation (“Instructions are given for a purpose. They must be obeyed”) is added in the English version.

Shift

Example 2.

ST: “不要旧秧歌，来个新的，大伙同意不同意？”

“同意，唱个新的。” 有人响应。

“好吧，” 张景祥停止唱歌，眼睛瞅着人堆里的刘胜，说道：

“我唱一个八路军的歌。” (Zhou, 1992:223)

TT: Someone clapped, but another shouted, “No more of those dirty ditties. How about a new song?”

“Right! A new song!” others responded.

“All right,” Zhang glanced at Liu Sheng. “I’ll sing one in praise of Chairman Mao.” (Zhou, 1981:206)

In Example 2, “我唱一个八路军的歌” (literally: I’ll sing a song in praise of the Eighth Route Army) is translated into “I’ll sing one in praise of Chairman Mao”. Are all the songs of the Eighth Route Army praising Chairman Mao? The answer is definitely no. If the specific social environment of the time is taken into account, such shift may be well justified. Yin Chengdong, deputy director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, maintains that for a long time after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, one major purpose of translating Chinese into foreign languages is to “raise the red flag of Mao Zedong Thought all over the world” (2009:13). Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that the adopted shift is exactly in line with the translation purpose and social ideology at that time.

Rewriting

Example 3.

ST: 鬼子找不到花姑娘，就去找那个五十多岁的瞎老婆婆。那老婆婆叫哭连天，警备队长周长泰尖溜溜的声音笑着说：“老刘婆婆，皇军爱你，都不嫌乎你老，那你就去嘛。有什么怕的呢？”玉宝气得心里直骂：“这些畜生！你也有母亲，你也有老婆、姑娘，为什么不带来陪鬼子呢？”眼看着可怜的老人被鬼子拉走了。(Gao, 1958:10)

TT: The devil seized this blind woman and started pushing her around. When she cursed them Chou Chang-tai shouted angrily at her, “Shut your mouth or I will kill you...” Locating him by ear, Liu swung her arm and give him a resounding slap in the face. Then she struck a Japanese near her. The devil, recovering, ran her through with his bayonet. As Liu staggered and fell dead Chou Chang-tai, rubbing his smarting face, kept up a flood of abuse. (Gao, 1975:20–21)

The shaping of the positive image in the novel is not only embodied in the portrayal of the protagonist, but also in minor characters. The blind old lady Liu in Example 3 appears only once in the novel where the traitors, not finding the “young girl” for pleasure, takes away the old lady Liu. The source text focuses on the despicable behaviors of the Japanese soldiers and Chinese traitors via the sufferings of such minor characters as Mrs. Liu. Mrs. Liu, for instance, “cried for a long time”, which shows her inability and submissiveness, while the translation is rewritten

as Liu cursing them, thus demonstrating the spirit of resistance. In addition, the source text euphemistically mentions “the old lady was pulled away by the devil”, while the translation adds the plots the original story does not cover, for example, “Locating him by ear, Liu swung her arm and give him a resounding slap in the face. Then she struck a Japanese near her. The devil, recovering, ran her through with his bayonet”. This rewriting creates a brave image of the old lady Liu who stands up to fight despite her blindness. Compared with the source text, the translation conveys to its readers not only the “evil deeds” of negative characters, but also ordinary people’s “resistance” against evil.

4.2. Shaping of Negative Images

Amplification

Example 4.

ST: 有个鬼子小队长，叫饭野的，把翠花儿糟蹋了。接着又是许多鬼子……

半夜，一个披头散发的女孩儿，爬到井跟前，抽抽噎噎地哭了一阵，就一头栽下井去。翠花儿……牺牲了！(Gao, 1958:74)

TT: First, she was raped by the Japanese platoon leader, Iino. Then, many other Japanese... In the early hours before dawn, a tousled, bedraggled, young girl crept into a well. She sobbed heartbrokenly for a few minutes, then plunged in, head first. Hua, another victim of Japanese aggression. (Gao, 1975:79)

In Example 4, “翠花儿……牺牲了！”(literally: Cuihua'er... died.) is translated as “Hua, another victim of Japanese aggression”, and the use of the added word “another” stresses that the sacrifice of “Cuihua” is only the tip of the iceberg that exposes the atrocities of invaders. Obviously, the above example indicates that the amplification in the translation indirectly portrays the cruel image of the negative character, further highlighting the publicity purpose of the original work.

Shift

Example 5.

ST: 好呵，蒋介石这时先来了一套妙法，他在中央军校召集学生讲了个话，嘿，请听！他讲得可妙哩！（Yang, 2004:96）

TT: Chiang Kai-shek thought up a trick to cope with the situation. He summoned the students to the Central Military Academy and made a speech. Listen to what he said, and see what an ass he is! (Yang, 1996:103)

Example 6.

ST: 咱们又可以在一块儿啦，又可以在一块儿革蒋秃子的命啦！（Yang, 2004:417）

TT: Oh, isn't it splendid! Now we can fight together against that monster Chiang Kai-shek! (Yang, 1996:431)

In Example 5, the teasing and sarcastic tone of “请听！他讲得可妙哩” (literally: Listen! How wonderfully he spoke!) is shifted into a straightforward condemnation in the translation—“Listen to what he said, and see what an ass he is!” In Example 6, the ironic expression in the original text of “蒋秃子” (literally: Jiang, the bald) is also shifted into a direct accusation of “that monster Chiang Kai-shek!”. Such a shift sacrifices the rhetoric of the original text for better publicity effects, which demonstrates the fact that literature serves and gives way to external considerations.

Rewriting

Example 7.

ST: 玉宝心里一边恨，一边骂：“我爷爷病了，我爹想杀一只鸡给爷爷吃，爷爷都不叫杀，这回叫恶鬼给吃了……叫你们这些黄皮狼子吃吧，吃了就叫你不得好死！”(Gao, 1958:9)

TT: Yu-pao cursed: Dad was going to sell those hens to buy medicine for granddad, but these devils are eating them... I hope they choke to death! (Gao, 1975:18)

In Example 7, the source text “我爹想杀一只鸡给爷爷吃，爷爷都不叫杀” (Literally: My father wanted to kill a chicken for my granddad to eat, but my granddad didn't agree.) is rewritten as “Dad was going to sell those hens to buy medicine for granddad”. In the source text, the hens that the “devils” eat should have been prepared to nourish “granddad” for he is seriously ill, while in the translation, those same hens are rewritten as the ones sold to buy medicine and save granddad's life, highlighting the evils of the invaders indirectly. The translator's subtlety and the motivation for the rewriting here are evident. It is not difficult to find that the translator has successfully displayed the evil deeds of various negative images in an indirect way, fulfilling the requirements of mainstream ideological publicity and intended translation purposes.

5. Conclusions

The C-E translations of Chinese modern and contemporary novels, bringing together the efforts and minds of previous generation of translators and experts at home and abroad, represent the massive translation campaign initiated by the state in the specific period. The contributions of these translations, though occasionally criticized as being endowed with explicit publicity purposes, to China's translation undertakings cannot be denied.

The above text analysis indicates that domestic literary translation activities were closely intertwined with external considerations for a long time after the founding of the New China, and were also marked with the ideological brand of the times. The C-E translation strengthens the specific elements of the source text by amplification, shift and rewriting to better adapt to the mainstream ideology and other publicity considerations. Examining texts from the view of ideology provides a unique perspective for translation research and practice, enriches the dimensions of translation research, and enables us to understand translation activities and processes in a more comprehensive manner.

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Bridges of Memory: The Form and Function of Fascist Aesthetics in Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain*

AMITRAJEET MUKHERJEE

On 8th December 1941 soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army began their invasion of the Malayan Peninsula, at the time a British colony, shortly after the Imperial Navy's surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii (Moore 88). The four years that followed would see the Japanese fight a brutal war against the Americans in the Pacific and occupy Malaya, marking what is arguably the most traumatic period in Malaysia's history. The fissures created by the experiences of being occupied by an Asian imperialist, who occupied the region by upstaging the reigning European colonialists, continue to echo in Malaysia's collective memory and politics today (Moore 93–95).

Revisiting the complex legacies of Malaysia's past, it is not surprising that both of Tan Twan Eng's historical fiction novels, *The Gift of Rain* (2007) and *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012), attempt to negotiate this particularly fraught chapter of Malaysian history. Both novels feature Japanese men as cornerstones in the growth and development of native protagonists. *The Gift of Rain* follows the narrative of Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton, the son of a British father and a Straits Chinese mother born and raised in the multi-ethnic island of Penang. Born as an inter-racial subject in the highly racialized society of colonial Malaya, Philip occupies a liminal space within the social and racial discourses which attempt to fix or denigrate his identity. Through Philip's budding relationship with his Japanese mentor, Hayato Endo, and the traumatic experiences he undergoes during the brutal Japanese occupation of Malaya during World War II, Tan Twan Eng explores the complex discursive relationships between identity and collective legacies of trauma and arguably offers an aesthetic vision for imploding the ideological structures of fascism that sought to co-opt Philip in his youth.

This paper argues that in doing so Tan Twan Eng employs aesthetic tropes to create an affective register that closely mirrors and clearly borrows from the aesthetics of Japanese Fascism itself. This paper analyses how Hayato Endo is both an accurate depiction of the product of Shōwa era fascism as well as attempts to deconstruct how Endo-san's training fashions Philip's own sensibilities. I shall attempt to analyse the interplay of ideology and aesthetics, and their effects on the subsequent development of Philip. The reason for analysing *The Gift of Rain* is rooted in the fact that the framed narrative of the novel also represents the key paradox of 'the fascist aesthetic moment'; it encodes the elements within itself that can resist the ideological interpellation of the individual. Philip's revisiting his past traumas with Michiko creates a possibility that may allow us to centre narratives of solidarity, compassion, and a shared confronting of the past to intervene in the ideological thrust of the 'fascist moment', even whilst borrowing from the aesthetic sensibility of that same 'fascist aesthetic'. Building on Friedrich Schiller's description of the crisis affecting the experience of modernity as a breakdown of the former myths that held together an organic structure of premodern society, Alan Tansman, in his seminal study of the aesthetics of Japanese Fascism, uses the term 'blankness' (in a reference to Max Weber) to define the existential instability to which fascist aesthetics were a response

in early 20th century Japan (19). By briefly analysing and comparing texts and aesthetic tropes that were in circulation in Shōwa era Imperial Japan I attempt to formulate a wider narrative structure to read the aesthetic tropes deployed by Tan Twan Eng in his text and how the text in turn offers narrative and ideological strategies and insights into understanding the functioning of ideological conscription through textual mediums as well as revisiting and re-evaluating the complex legacies of trauma and loss which need to be engaged when grappling with the post-colonial histories of Asia.

For writers and artists in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s, enacting a state of communion, performing a devotion to duty and in the process subsuming their consciousness to larger mythicized constructs which harked back to a glorified feudal past became the antidote to the fragmented and conflicted experience of modernity and the pressures and anxieties which were part of the Japanese state's experience with the West (Tansman 19–20). In this process there was a deliberate attempt by writers to manufacture 'values and attitudes that would be held so deeply that they would appear innate and not imposed (Tansman 23)'. This allowed a mode for Japanese aesthetic culture to engage with the anxieties of the modern industrial age by creating narratives of continuity imbued with spiritualized and transcendental aspirations. In effect it opened the bridge for the aestheticization of Japanese politics in the early 20th century. In this vein, Herbert Bix has noted the passionate visions for rebuilding Japanese society around the deified body of the Emperor from the early 1920s from the Japanese Far-Right (ch. 2).

In using the term 'fascism' to describe the ideological formations that were gaining currency in interwar Japan I am taking recourse to the theories of the post-war political scientist Masao Maruyama. He describes the obfuscation between the private and public domains in Japanese polity, a process begun during the Meiji era, as one of the key contributors of inscribing the Japanese Emperor with his status of divinity and imbuing moral authority within the person of the Emperor. This essentially catapulted politics and the space of state ideology from beyond the 'public' sphere to be located deeply within the private sphere of Japanese citizens' lives (Maruyama 27). This was the cornerstone for creating a state where the ethical system was organically intertwined with structures and institutions of the state. Moral absolutism and a spiritualized aesthetic became the basis for Japanese authoritarianism as the Japanese Emperor, by definition, held sway over the very spirits of his subjects (Maruyama 31). This led to what Maruyama calls an 'exteriorization of morality', where the locus of Japanese morality and sensibilities did not lie in the individual conscience but in the affairs of the nation (32). Japanese atrocities during the War can be understood within this framework where morality was defined by the affairs of state rather than the existence of an individual conscience. This also formed the basis for the vision of the Japanese state (and the Imperial body) being an organic extension of the Japanese family/clan which in turn was consolidated by an underlying theocratic structure of State Shinto ideology (Skya 5). The term fascism is entirely appropriate in the Japanese context given the very real jealousy that many Nazi ideologues felt for the seemingly organic Japanese ideological structures which supposedly reflected the ultimate social vision that the Nazis hoped to build in Germany (Skya 136).

To return to the domain of aesthetics, one has to read the existence of a specific Japanese 'fascist aesthetic' from multiple angles. The creation of a system of aesthetic tropes and cultural signifiers within Japanese literature of the times which might portend a fascist imagination was rooted in the aforementioned fissures produced in Japanese culture by the stresses of modernity. Japanese writers struggled to articulate a new aesthetic system to address the fragmented sense of self, the deracination of an increasingly materialist bourgeoisie, and the complex reactions to Western culture that were hallmarks of Japanese modernity. A return to a Romantic imagination with visions of nature and centring utopic spaces of natural beauty, encoding a transcendental aspiration to reach a state of wholeness from the fractured subjectivity of modernity,

and in trying to do so reaching back to a seemingly organic sensibility stemming from 'native' traditions of the past became mainstays of the Japanese fascist imagination. One can clearly discern the complicated relationship with Western philosophies such as German Idealism that is encoded in this aesthetic imagination. Tansman notes that Japanese fascism articulated a very modern resistance to the forces of modernity, by ironically deploying a mythicized Japanese past. This is altogether a familiar trope for the Fascist aesthetic, as Alice Kaplan notes that 'a social defence against modernization can itself be aesthetically modern', while discussing the aesthetics of French Fascism (qtd in Tansman 30).

Taking into cognizance the nature of the Imperial ideological structure which was taking shape in Japan in the Shōwa era, it becomes clear as to how Romantic aesthetic imaginations managed to conflate themselves with the ideology of 'ultra-nationalism' to create what Tansman calls the 'fascist moment', an affective moment of epiphany in which multiple discourses of spiritualized political imaginations and millenarian yearnings intersect, susceptible to be channelled into political action (Tansman 30). Tansman notes that an appeal to a cultural sublime trading in mythic images offering possibilities of repose and an appreciation of the 'beautiful' articulated beyond the realm of the positivistic language of utilitarianism which marked modern imaginations were marks of this 'fascist moment' (21). Philip Fisher deploys the concept of 'wonder' as a moment of pure feeling marked by its sense of visceral experience which 'demands one's attention and leaves no room for reflection or abstraction from the immediacy of the moment' (qtd in Tansman 35). This sense of immediacy is evoked in Endo-san's directions to Philip to instinctively 'feel' his actions in performing aikido (Tan 53). This ideology of epiphany offers solace and a sense of purpose and opens the possibility for achieving 'wholeness' to the deracinated self of the modern individual.

Philip Arminius Khoo-Hutton at the outset of the novel exists in the liminal zone of racialized colonial society. He is the picture of an individual subjectivity serrated by the multiple identities he is forced to traverse while being unable to own any of them. He presents the reader a picture of the alienated, fragmented self, unmoored from his own sense of history and given to social maladjustment (Tan 31-45). Philip is bereft from the organic ties of community and family due to his alienation. It is this selfhood in Philip that Endo-san painstakingly stitches back together by reconnecting him with a sense of community, as is evident from Philip's growing attachment to his English father and siblings and Chinese grandfather through the course of the novel. In instigating his meeting with Mr. Khoo, Endo-san is the thrust behind Philip reclaiming his own history which locates him in a cultural network that circulates from China, Malaya and to affective connections to Japan (in this life and the previous one) (Tan 149). This is precisely the space within which Japanese Fascist imaginations also converged in critiquing and reimagining political and cultural structures.

This urgency to recreate the individual, language and aesthetics itself to address the crises of modernity is exactly what the influential Japanese critic Kobayashi Hideo saw in the very modernist prose of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Hideo contended that Akutagawa was engaged in the process of transforming language itself to achieve the cadences of incantation, thus imbuing a sense of the 'lost spirit' within the realm of the literary (Tansman 55). Akutagawa's sensational suicide in 1927 further gave credence to a developing Japanese imagination which began to combine elements of this modernist experimentation with form, redefining aesthetics and adding the tropes of melancholy and a stylized death to the currency of symbolism as the basis for a renewed Japanese literature. Similarly, scenes of natural beauty providing utopic possibilities of tranquillity which are yet marked by a strain of melancholy and the awareness of loss came to be part of the same system of cultural signifiers. Tansman takes the example of Satō Haruo's poetry describing Japanese gardens as a prime example (19). The echoes with the garden designed by Nakamura Aritomo in Tan Twan Eng's other novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012) is evident.

Unlike the triumphalist grand narratives of Nazi propaganda, Japanese fascist aesthetes acknowledged a keen sense of loss within their imagery. Tansman takes the example of Itami Mansaku's 1937 film 'The New Earth', set in the backdrop of the Imperial conquest of Manchuria, as case in point (27). The pathos of loss and the experience and acknowledgment of beauty which is dependent on the beautiful being transitory and inherently ephemeral, to be experienced intuitively only in a snatch of feeling, pervade the Japanese fascist imagination as in the closing scene depicting a couple momentarily reunited on the vast Manchurian plain in Mansaku's film. A similar sensibility is communicated by both of Tan's Japanese characters, Endo-san and Aritomo, and the indelible impressions they leave on their respective proteges. The culmination of all these tropes arguably comes about in the essay on Japanese bridges written by the Romantic writer Yasuda Yojūrō. Yasuda, when passing a Japanese bridge while journeying on a train, dives into an essay which trades in the tropes of nostalgic reverie, and elevates the bridge to an eschatological metaphor which becomes a psychic link spanning and connecting modernity with the notion of eternity rooted in a Japanese past (Tansman 77). Yasuda's writing reaches the final culmination of fascist art where he clearly uses the modalities of 'kitsch', to create moments of beauty which become the basis for an intuitive sensibility that can overcome the anxieties of conflicted modern self-hood to forge vaunting aspirations for transcendence, and thus be imbued with a spiritualized vigour for action. It is not for nothing that Yasuda and his writings would become reviled reminders of a traumatic past in post-war Japan (Tansman 81).

All of the sensibilities which were playing out in the field of Japanese aesthetics and ideology in the 1930s are accurately reproduced in the character of Hayato Endo. When explaining his background to Philip, Endo-san reveals his belonging to a traditional Japanese samurai family during their meal at Suzuki's restaurant (Tan 64). Endo-san's service to the Emperor is also framed within the narrative of the family-state as he reveals that he is beholden to an economy of 'honour' with respect to Emperor Hirohito in light of the dishonour brought to his house by his father's 'treason' (Tan 65). Additionally, Endo-san's positioning as a samurai immediately connects real historical threads as the seminal text of samurai culture, Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hagakure*, was the direct inspiration for the *Senjinkun* (Skya 7). Endo-san's loyalty to Hirohito remains unwavering to the end when he commits *seppuku*, except possibly in the case of his beloved pupil Philip. That Endo-san is aware of the powerful interplay between political ideology and the martialling of aesthetics to achieve political actions is made clear when on hearing the words of a choir song at St. George's Church he remarks of it as 'a song powerful enough to drive a nation' (Tan 74). Endo-san being deeply influenced by the semiotics of an authoritarian Shōwa Japan are communicated in more nuanced manners as well. His practice of aikido is framed within images of martial sensibility coupled with keen aesthetic refinement. Arguably in his descriptions of *zazen*, and the Zen philosophy that infuses Endo-san's interactions as mentor to Philip, one could argue that Tan himself deals in kitsch to communicate the mysticism that Endo-san expresses during his personal quest for a sense of unity and self-actualization, which is subsequently transplanted in Philip. This subtle internalization of sensibility is clear in the evocative imagery of the poem by Solomon Bloomgarden that Philip presents to Endo-san (Tan 102).

Zen culture traditionally had deep roots in a martial aesthetic in feudal Japan. Edwin Reischauer squarely located a 'toughness' in the medieval Japanese military aristocracy in their practice of Zen (qtd in Hoover 48). In the Kamakura period, under Shogun Yoritomo Minamoto, Zen philosophy came to be deeply associated with the skill and practice of swordsmanship (traditionally the purview of the samurai). Zen training was also a key component to the practice of archery (Hoover 51), which is the martial form preferred by Tan's other Japanese mentor figure in *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Aritomo (Tan 60). Post the failure of Kublai Khan's invasion of Japan in 1281, mentorship, a marshalling of noble individual impulses to perform sacred 'duty' and the development of skills of swordsmanship and archery became hallmarks of samurai cul-

ture. This in turn effectively also signified a deep allegiance to and acceptance of the divinity of the Japanese Emperor (Hoover 51–52). Endo-san's own background in a samurai family and his association with the martial image of the *Nagamitsu Katana* (a priceless medieval Japanese sword) (Tan 99), all convey his location within an established martial tradition infused with a spiritual sensibility.

Zen culture would become a signifier for the growing political interaction with the realm of spiritualism in modern Japan. Kakuzo Okakura in his book *The Awakening of Japan* describes Zen Buddhism as a cornerstone of the 'School of Oyomei' (76). The Oyomei ideology rooted in the belief of cosmic destruction and recreation in perpetuity arguably reflects one of the well-springs for Fascist imaginations with its stress on creating new spiritual life-worlds from 'amid the tumultuous crash of a myriad of dissolving worlds' (Okakura 77). Zen culture's stress on the cycle of karma are equally reflected in Endo-san's mystical beliefs in the centuries long cycles of repetition which intertwine the fates of Philip and himself in past lives. In a sense one could say that Zen is Endo-san's 'bridge' to creating an organic connection with past life-worlds. Zen's Pan-Asian philosophical history is also reflected in the functioning of Oyomei thought in Japanese expansionist aspirations, as Okakura testifies that 'among those of our generals and admirals who have distinguished themselves in the Chinese and Russian wars, many were brought up as youths in the principles of Oyomei (81).'

While the philosophical registers of a Zen culture drawing on romanticized martial traditions is clear when reading Endo-san's practice of aikido, a more subtle exchange occurs when Endo-san begins inscribing Philip within these cultural networks through training. In his analysis of the text, David Lim reads Endo-san's mentorship of Philip as the working of the feudal Japanese institution of Shudō. This was a key formulation of the 'samurai way' of acculturation with intrinsic implications of personal loyalty, love and devotion between mentor and mentee (Lim 8). Gary Leupp explicitly identified 'dying for one's lover' (qtd in Lim 9) as one of the emotive bases for the *Nanshoku* relationship. The search for an aestheticized code where self-erasure in the form of self-sacrifice for a romanticized ideal or a very tangible, physical loyalty were encoded within samurai culture, are clearly visible in the close relationship of Philip and Endo-san and are clearly marked with signifiers of the Japanese fascist aesthetic. When read together with Tan's use of the trope of karmic repetition, the space-time relation of Endo-san and Philip is destabilized from temporality to seek a continuity with the eternal. This attempts to create a 'bridge' (to use Yasuda's metaphor) which is both indicative of a wider circulation of symbols and continuities in an 'Asian' space while also being squarely located in the language of fascist longings.

Taking Gregory Pflugfelder's description of Shudō as a 'discipline of mind and body, a set of practices and knowledge expected to bring both spiritual and physical rewards to those who choose to follow its path (qtd in Lim 8)', one could argue that Endo-san's training of Philip is a subtle working of ideological interpellation in the guise of philosophy and physical, performative, and aesthetic forms (in terms of aikido). Philip's education under Endo-san leads to his imbibing of Japanese mores and in an affective sense culminates with his transformation into an ideal of the *Nippon-zin* (Lim 10). While at a tangible level it is clear that Endo-san uses Philip to scout out Penang for the coming invasion, the relationship between them is further complicated by their romantic attraction and Philip's refusal to be truly indoctrinated in the official Imperial ideology of the Occupation forces. This signals a more complicated picture of how far Philip has been truly interpellated to the fascist ideology.

Lim takes the examples of Malay youth who were given ideological indoctrination by the Japanese during the Occupation but never developed any affinity for Emperor worship, but rather were made conscious of a native Malayan nationalism in the process, to read Philip's ideological framing (11). Philip Hutton was co-opted by the Occupation forces to collaborate with General Yamashita's brutal regime. Yet it is clear that Philip's intrinsic motivations

to aid the Japanese stem from personal loyalties to his family and friends, a state of affairs that his youthfulness precludes him from perceiving to be a route to tragedy. To comprehend the workings of ideology here Lim employs Žižek's behaviourist theory of ideology to understand Philip's actions. Žižek alters Althusser's formulation of the working of ideological apparatus to signal that individual actions may not be completely beholden to the fact of interpellation by the ideological machine (qtd in Lim 12-13). There may exist a dissonance between individual action and the true scope of aesthetics being deployed to foster ideological leanings. Tansman uses the work of Garrett Stewart to posit that aestheticized interpellation cannot be the final word on the working of individual agency. The text (in this case Endo-san's influence) 'may model and mandate but not monitor the reader's response' in a strategy of what Stewart terms 'textual conscription' (qtd in Tansman 31). Building on this analysis one can clearly see how Philip's agency is not compromised by the internalization of aesthetics but the very real threat of physical force in the final instance. However, I would argue that the subtle working of Endo-san's 'textual conscription' of Philip lies not in his lack of affinity to Japanese Imperialism, but his inscribing himself within the narratives of personal loyalty and duty.

There is a need to historicize this functioning of fascist ideology in this instance lest it seem that the narrative of the fascist aesthetic become a totalizing one. Real Japanese servicemen's loyalties were not as simply directed to the Emperor and the *Kokutai* (national polity) as the Yasukuni Shrine might have us believe. In locating Philip's actions to loyalties which could in their inception be subversive to the overarching state ideology yet lead to actions which are quintessentially in service to fascist regimes, there are striking similarities between the character and motivations of Philip to those of actual Japanese *Tokkotai* (Kamikaze) pilots. In her remarkable study of the diaries of young 'student-soldier' pilots mobilized by General Takijiro Onishi to fly suicide missions against the Americans in 1945, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, gives us a glimpse into characters very similar to Tan's protagonist. Just like Philip these students of prestigious Japanese universities were extremely well-read and had a keenly developed aesthetic and philosophical sensibility, with Goethe, Marx, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche being staple reading material (Ohnuki-Tierney 73). More strikingly, their diaries and testimonies clearly indicate that the night before their fateful flights, young men like Seki Yukio, Umezawa Kazuyo and Machida Dokyo were flying not for their Emperor but out of loyalty and for the safety of their newly wedded wives and mother respectively (Ohnuki-Tierney 173-176). Philip's internalization of Endo-san's education would lead to just such a progression.

Philip's *bildungsroman* being rooted in a radical strain of very modern anti-modernist imaginings allows for the emergence of a spiritualized, aestheticized selfhood that relocates him from a space of liminality to find and experience the sensate moment of beauty and through it find meaning and purpose to salvage his fractured individuality to a state of wholeness. The subtle ideological tug here comes in the form of the language of duty and loyalty which becomes the bedrock of a maturing Philip. Hence, Philip Hutton culminates for the reader from the distant, sullen teenager at the start of the novel to the passionate and devoted young man who risks his life for his forged loyalties to friends (Kon) and in the ultimate internalization of the 'stylized death', is willing to have his own head on the chopping block of execution in a bid to save a father with whom his relationship had started off coldly and ambivalently (Tan 545).

While the Yasuki episode was a foreshadow to Philip's own conflicts with divided loyalties to the Resistance and to the person of Endo-san, a man who at least at a crucial moment valued his loyalty to Emperor Hirohito above his loyalty to Philip; Philip at the instance of becoming *Kaishakunin* to Endo-san has clearly imbibed the sacralised spirit of duty. In this sense, despite his hesitation to swing the *katana*, it is a call to 'duty' which forces him to give his lover/mentor the idealized death of the samurai way through *seppuku*. It is revealing that Endo-san's last words to him are a harsh command of 'Do your duty!' (Tan 545). The irony of this culmination

of events is an indication of how it is trauma and eventually the burdens of memory that mark and break Philip's subjectivity in the years after the war. It is evident from his silence on his deep personal losses during the War and his keen division of his life as a successful businessman in post-war Malaya, even as he seemingly futilely attempts to preserve the past in the rapidly transforming geography of Penang. The fascistic narratives which underlay the mores of duty, loyalty, unquestioned devotion, and purposive sacralised action which allowed the pre-war Philip Hutton to come to terms with his past were directly implicated in his divided selfhood of the future, unable to confront the past or come to terms with his trauma.

It is with the arrival of Michiko Murakami and in Philip's subsequent act of storytelling that the text allows for an intervention in the ideological thrust of the fascist moment which had left Philip's actions to be rendered in the sacralised space of following through with the performative logic of Imperial ideology in aiding Endo-san's suicide. Cathy Caruth's theories of trauma effectively diagnose Philip as the state of the traumatized 'carrying with them their impossible histories' (qtd in Saxena 181), until he is truly able to create his own bridge to his past memories to gain a sense of closure. What Vandana Saxena describes as Philip accessing 'multi-directional memories' of the past becomes the gateway for Philip and Michiko to both come to terms with and heal from the past (183). In doing so they employ the mode of revisiting their own memories and sharing in their wounds. This opens up a means of facing past trauma that inscribes solidarity and compassion between two people, despite having been on different sides of the war, to find an organic connection to each other steeped in the language of emotions and reconnecting with their past. Instead of creating a sacralised call to aestheticized (violent) performance, it is here that Tan Twan Eng uses the very tropes of the fascist moment to energize an undoing of the effects of the previous inscribing in those imaginations that Philip, the ideological subject, underwent.

In Philip playing the role of *Kaishakunin* to Michiko, the text clearly aims at a wholly different affective register than when he performed the same role for Endo-san. In swinging the *katana* for Michiko, Philip is not moved to action by 'duty', or playing out the performance of the Imperial logic of Endo-san having to commit *seppuku* on account of Japan's losing the war. As Lisa Yoneyama noted about the trauma of the survivors of Hiroshima, the dialectic of memory and time left psychic as well as physical wounds on them (18). Philip in building a bridge to his past memory also builds a metaphoric bridge of compassion and understanding with Michiko over their shared sense of loss and longing for Endo-san, and the complicated legacy that is their inheritance from the war years, which in Michiko's case includes the very real cancer of her body due to radiation poisoning. In aiding Michiko's euthanasia, Philip is in turn released from the cycle of pain as he himself experiences a unity rooted in love and sharing, and intrinsically is able to come to terms with his past and experience the actual gift of rain of his own and Michiko's tears as 'finally they came' (Tan 595). The connection he feels through the same language of emotion, but dislocated from the grand-narratives of duty, allows them both a moment of true transcendental unity with the perceived spirit of Endo-san (Tan 594). It is through this highly emotionally charged moment of writing that Tan Twan Eng seems to make an intervention into the field of fascist aesthetics and in so doing teases out an alternate narrative strategy which yet remains deeply personal in revisiting the 'unfinished business of the war' (to use Ian Buruma's phrase). Tan Twan Eng may deploy the fascist aesthetic but is clearly in no way making the fascist ideological operation inherent to his text, but rather subtly imploding its own narrative and undoing the sacralising effect of ideology with Philip's simple observation of the *Nagamitsu katanas* of 'appearing almost unremarkable under the spotlights' when donating them to the President of the Penang Historical Society (Tan 599). The bridge of memory may offer a narrative opportunity yet to revisit and reappraise the tragedies of the past, and in that instance to then bring into focus all those other young Philips who flew off on

their planes, with cherry-blossoms in their helmets, and never had the opportunity for closure, in an attempt to truly engage with healing these generational traumas that indelibly mark the collective histories of Asia.

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Book Reviews

ADORNO'S 'MINIMA MORALIA' IN THE 21ST CENTURY: FASCISM, WORK, AND ECOLOGY. By Caren Irr (Ed.). London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 181 pp.

Of all Theodor Adorno's major texts, *Minima Moralia* is the only one that has made the perilous crossing from the remote encampments of academic contemplation to the mainland of a general readership. In Germany, particularly, it remains his most widely read book, but its numerous translations have ensured it a broader reception throughout the world. First published in 1951, after the author had returned from wartime exile in the United States, it consists of 153 aphorisms, a number that seems from the outset to equip it with an elevated canonicity – three more than the Psalms, one fewer than the Sonnets of Shakespeare. The pieces were written in a Los Angeles teeming with the deracinated intelligentsia of crumbling Europe, between 1944 and 1947. Many of their shorter statements have become the best-known examples of Adorno's thought, and while the book is not lacking in flights of abstract philosophising, it is famously full of personal insights based on its author's state of cultural homelessness and the fragmentation of genuine experience in a reified society, presaged, he argued, by the all-encompassing consumer culture well on the way to completion in America. The book's subtitle, *Reflections from Damaged Life*, intends these meditations to be not so much a shoring of fragments against the ruins, not as a conservative Eliotian lament for what has been lost, but an active repudiation of what now exists, the excoriation of which begins with the objective damage itself.

Passing over the frankly bizarre assertion of the writer of the cover copy that *Minima Moralia* is a 'lesser-known work' of Adorno's, a dedicated volume of essays on the book is to be welcomed. It represents the proceedings of a one-day conference at Brandeis University in 2019, published in book form in 2021 to mark its source text's seventieth anniversary. Four pairs of contributions under the headings of fascism, the aphoristic form, the nature of work in the present day, and ecological concerns make for a series of productive inroads into the text, and there is an impression throughout that participants were invited to address themselves to a set of suggested passages, which crop up in the discussions with methodical regularity. Peter Gordon, one of the more perceptive of the present generation of Adorno scholars in the United States, contributes a thoughtful Foreword that sets the scene biographically, historically, and also in terms of the book's anticipation of the themes and methods that would characterise Adorno's later work.

Contributions to a multi-authored volume are, by their collective nature, uneven in tone and procedure. Jakob Norberg's tin-eared characterisation of *Minima Moralia* as an advice manual seems to suggest it would do well among the burgeoning sections of bookshops devoted to 'Smart Thinking', where business strategies and self-help nostrums proliferate. Wyatt Sarafin discovers he would rather talk about anything but Adorno, a failure of focus instantiated by his apparent belief that *Minima Moralia* was having its 'seventeenth anniversary' in 2021. Clangers like that were once the job of editors to edit out. The remainder of the volume, however, is much more inspiring.

The great theme of Adorno's text, outlined in the opening Dedication to his friend and colleague, Max Horkheimer, is the fate of subjective experience in the modern world. Where idealist philosophy, in Kant and Hegel, had elevated the individual to the level of being constitutive of the world around him, the richness and variegation of reality was in danger of being confounded. Now that the individual is the precise index of the damage inflicted by a reality that cares nothing for him, the truth might well emerge from articulation of the insults and injuries he suffers. 'In the period of his decay,' Adorno writes, 'the individual's experience of himself and what he encounters contributes

once more to knowledge, which he had merely obscured as long as he continued unshaken to construe himself positively as the dominant category.' These experiences could not be further, however, from the realms of the practical advice industry of life-coaches, who, as Caleb Shaoning Fridell puts it in 'Life Still Doesn't Live', 'pretend to liberate listeners while freeing them only from the possibility of recognising their own imprisonment'.

One of the most tenacious currents of criticism of Adorno's version of historical materialism is that, as Raymond Geuss has claimed in *Outside Ethics* (2005), his notion of the intuition that suffering ought to be abolished is 'undialectical' and 'undifferentiated', that it falls short because it does not engender a programme of ameliorative political action. The can-do briskness of this attitude is in SD Chrostowska's sights when she points out in 'Adorno's Senses of Critique' that '[t]he challenge facing critical theory is to dwell in despair ... since, without this, critique cannot give reason to hope, just as it cannot give hope to reason'. Adorno was constitutionally averse to the suggestion that all critique ought to be constructive, and as such already sworn to the status quo ante by accepting its terms. 'Only a god can save us,' Nazism's on-call metaphysician, Martin Heidegger, had told an interviewer from *Der Spiegel* in 1966, in the course of trying to explain away his erstwhile cheerleading for Hitler. Speaking to the same journal three years later, Adorno would counter that 'nothing but despair can save us,' for only despair illuminates the path to truth. In much the same vein, he had inverted Spinoza's famous dictum that truth is an index both of itself and of the false (*Verum index sui et falsi*): henceforth, it was falsity, errancy, the fallacious and the dishonest that indexed both itself and the countervailing truth. 'The wrong life cannot be lived rightly,' states one of the handful of single-sentence epigrams in *Minima Moralia*.

Andrea Dara Cooper offers a suggestive reflection on 'Adorno and Animality after Auschwitz', attending to the philosopher's contention that the mistreatment of animals is not simply a calamity for the victims, but already deadens the sensitivities of those who inflict it, in a way that paves the way for even greater barbarities. The suffering of creatures that lack reflexive self-consciousness throws a harsh light on human willingness to participate in the worst crimes, as in the autobiographical note in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) in which the small boy's image of the first human being was conceived in the sight of an innkeeper named Adam clubbing the scurrying rats in his courtyard. Cooper is less than satisfied that Adorno is sufficiently attentive to the imperatives of animal rights, 'highlighting the animal as a means to illuminate implications to the human'. That is the entire point, though: the greater humaneness that the animal ought to call forth in humanity would then result in human beings who would be properly intolerant of all cruelty. 'The possibility of pogroms,' Adorno states in *Minima Moralia*, 'is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze – "after all, it's only an animal" – reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings...' The transcending of the type of inhumanity often given the name of bestiality depends on seeing their mutual interlocking. The animals that populate Kafka's fables are ever-present reminders of their imbrication with the human, from the gigantic bug into which Gregor Samsa finds himself metamorphosed to the panther that replaces the hunger-artist in his cage to the satisfaction of the gaping crowds.

Thinking about the ramifications of creatureliness in 'Adorno's Anthropocene', Caren Irr confronts a more feral beast than those that perish in abattoirs, and that stands for the anonymous nature that the world of globalised capitalism, in the course of rushing the planet to its extinction, has spawned. 'The feral creature,' she notes, 'is a domesticated one that adapts to wildness; it is a weed, an invasive species', a development that she connects to Adorno's fascination with the wilful stupidity that seduces so many citizens of the administered world. Among the various techniques for the animation of frozen obtuseness on the terrene scale, Irr takes in irrationalism, self-interest and, perhaps surprisingly, romantic love. Oshrat Silberbusch considers the now notorious rhetorical leaps in Adorno's prose that allow him to move seamlessly from condemning sliding windows to detecting the physical habits in which fascism takes root. Her essay should be read in conjunction with her fine recent monograph, *Adorno's Philosophy of the Nonidentical: Thinking as Resistance* (2018).

Minima Moralia is, primarily and finally and incipiently once again, a catalogue of the multitudinous wrongs that modern life has coerced its clients, universally, to endure. If its strictures add up to a sociocultural physiognomy of a nation poised on the brink of global pre-eminence – the tough guys in their Cadillacs, the dinner-jacketed gent spurting a little soda into his post-prandial whiskey, the radio stations playing swing, the cinema audiences staring rapt at the monochromatically glowing face of Lana Turner – its reflections are more than mere period-pieces. They sounded the theme on which postwar societies have played tireless variations ever since.

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THEODOR W. ADORNO: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION. By Andrew Bowie. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 127 pp.

If those of us who have written introductory guides to the substantial corpus of Theodor Adorno's thought have felt it necessary to acknowledge, at least partly out of intellectual guilt, that the Frankfurt theoretician would utterly have repudiated such an approach, the task Andrew Bowie has taken on would appear to mandate nothing less than the penitence of the medieval flagellant. Oxford's Very Short Introductions series, inaugurated in 1995, now runs to more than 700 diminutive volumes on everything and everybody from Abolitionism to Zola.

Adorno is the first luminary of the Frankfurt School's inaugural generation to be included, having been inducted into the pocket-sized pantheon ahead of either Walter Benjamin or Herbert Marcuse. Bowie, whose previous works include an authoritative study, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy* (2013), dispenses with the *mea culpa* and plunges straight in with a reference to the interview Adorno gave to *Der Spiegel* in the year that he died. 'Herr Professor,' the interviewer begins, intending to refer to a recent explosion of student unrest, 'two weeks ago, everything seemed all right with the world,' only to be peremptorily cut off by the Professor: 'Not to me it didn't'.

In an age when, to recast the dictum of Friedrich Schlegel on the philosophy of art, what passes for critical theory usually lacks either the critique or the theory, it is more than ever essential to recall that the work of the Frankfurt School and its disciplinary foundation, the Institute for Social Research, was nothing if not a thoroughgoing assault on contemporary society and its shabbily culpable cultural forms. It is worth remembering this above all because, although the Frankfurt School has an unassailable place on the historical syllabus of politics, philosophy, sociology and cultural studies, and Adorno in particular is held to be one of the twentieth century's most versatile, original and provocative theorists, very little work being produced in these disciplines now actually bears much relation to the thinking of Frankfurt's first generation. Where it does surface, it is either too shallow or one-dimensional, lacking in dialectical proficiency, or else refused as hopelessly elitist or unrelentingly cheerless.

Andrew Bowie is a responsive and clear-sighted interpreter of Adorno's thought, by no means a blinkered acolyte but encouragingly resistant, except in one or two perennial instances, to the tendency to line up the familiar row of fairground ducks, against which traditional and analytic social theory has felt itself obliged to take aim. It is true, nonetheless, that Bowie is sensitive to a certain excess in Adorno's rhetorical idiom and, by extension, the substance of his arguments. On the opening page, a warning is sounded about the 'sometimes unnecessary obscurity of his prose style', a caution that is repeated a little further on, where we are told that his writing 'sometimes ... tips over into unnecessary opacity'. In a subsequent chapter on Adorno's philosophy of history, it is stated that he entertains a 'sometimes hyperbolic view of the "totality" of modern society'. These caveats are intended less in the spirit of *lasciate ogne speranza* than in the manner of the calorie counts on a

restaurant menu. There will be some propositions that are not only difficult to digest, but that are probably not very good for you.

As Bowie makes abundantly clear, these moments where Adorno's discourse appears to exceed reasonable bounds are deliberate strategic moves, equivalent to the startling *sforzando* in music. Terry Eagleton once expressed this as Adorno's being 'more concerned to rub the ridiculousness of his doctrines in our face than to defend them'. If this makes him sound like a zany irrationalist or, even worse, somebody who had up his sleeve a set of impartible doctrines, the true emphasis of these observations is that he believed that postwar social conditions in the capitalist Western hemisphere amounted to a 'context of delusion', with which contentedly rubbing along was a dereliction of the critical faculty that might begin to dispel it, while raising considered objections in the mild-mannered Social Democratic tradition amounted to already playing its lethal game. In the 1960 essay, 'Opinion Delusion Society', Adorno states that deviant, lunatic opinion is not a fringe manifestation of false consciousness, as traditional Marxism was inclined to see it, but arises from within the circuit of normal opinion as such. Because the world is a heteronomous network, idiotic opinion feels like self-assertion, so that pointing out patiently how ill-informed it is does nothing to detoxify the underlying structural-psychological soil from which it springs. Among the non-fascist recourses people of the day resorted to were the conservative superstitions of astrology, a topic on which Adorno wrote an exhaustive work of content analysis, 'The Stars Down to Earth'.

The hyperbolic expressions that Adorno himself risks in his work, particularly in the short essays and radio lectures he wrote throughout the 1950s and 1960s, are intended to blast apart the consensus in which dynamic critical thinking becomes ossified. Criticism of this approach is less effective when it simply takes Adorno's assertions literally, as his successor Jürgen Habermas would do, pointing out what we have already intuited in letting an outrageous declaration pass. In *Negative Dialectics*, he claims that '[p]eople are spellbound without exception, and none of them is capable of love, which is why everyone feels loved too little'. The suggestion that everybody is deluded has Habermas out of his seat with a point of order, on the grounds that if everybody was deluded, the author of this statement would have to be too. Is nobody in the world capable of love? Do our own disappointed lives not furnish the odd warm-hearted exception? Is there nobody who feels loved enough, even momentarily, even if they have to rake through the vanished past to recall such a time? And yet, as a critique of damaged emotional life in a society that, having put the old sentimental affects to the torch of the capitalist exchange principle, while simultaneously taunting them with their tearjerking simulations in the productions of the culture industry, the damning, sweeping verdict exposes a moment of truth.

If there is a problem with this mode of thinking in the present generation, half a century after Adorno's death, it is that rhetorical exaggeration has been co-opted by the worst elements in international politics, and turned instead into a version of truth as poisoned facticity. There is hardly any need to list the political leaders who have found this style suits their nefarious purposes precisely. That doesn't, in itself, render such a cathexis of critical thinking invalid, only impose on its practitioner the duty to make it quite clear that a general and genuine liberation of fettered social subjects, not their immurement in infantile delusion, is the goal.

Bowie shines a brilliant hermeneutic light on Adorno's theory of the historicity of nature, both the second nature people have inherited from the socialisation of preceding generations and that of the now widely despoiled and imperilled natural world. The twin currents of nature and history are mutually determining, meaning that human history itself is not a process that arose purely from natural impulses, but nor is the natural world, to the defence of which Green politics has rallied, simply a changeless essential principle underneath the injuries it has sustained since the industrialisation of the developed world. Although he disappointingly reiterates in passing the fashionable libel that Adorno's theoretical work bears some 'philosophical proximity' to that of the Nazi magus Heidegger, Bowie does at least also concede that the present-day trend to cultural nationalism, in whose service

the rector of Freiburg preached the pre-eminence of the Classical Greeks and the Germans, represents the corrosive depletion of the human spirit's chances of self-determination.

When he turns to Adorno's aesthetic theory, Bowie finds the going considerably rougher. A charge he curiously brings against it is that it is too wedded to philosophical structures of thinking, which seems a surprising way to miss the point. The case that Adorno makes for the liberating social potential of avant-garde music at the last mid-century, that by refusing the language of tradition it retained the possibility of inducing audiences to perceive the truth of alienation, may not have survived the subsequent sterility of twelve-tone technique, as Adorno would acknowledge, but its problem as a case is hardly that its philosophical dimension overburdens it. 'His dialectical reversal is too dependent on a philosophical idea,' Bowie thinks. In any case, he suggests, the theory was wrong because tonality, once convicted of desuetude, lives on. Perhaps it does – rock and roll will never die – but that scarcely in itself equips it for taking on a critical role.

There are very few critics alive who are prepared to defend Adorno's animadversions on jazz, a form to which he was constitutionally allergic. At the risk of a *reductio ad hominem*, it is worth pointing out that Professor Bowie's case for the defence rests on the witness of his own alter ego as Andy Bowie, jazz saxophonist. This case relies on the notion of 'participation', suggesting that, as Adorno and I suspected, jazz is considerably more entertaining to those who play it than to those who listen to it. The theory that it represents a form of resistance to the musical establishment, of 'opposing convention', was exploded generations ago by practitioners like Guy Lombardo and Cleo Laine, but in any case, some acknowledgement that, as a musical form, it has long been assimilated by the culture industry would have had the astringent merit of candour.

It is true that a musical effect with which Adorno is prepared to credit the work of Gustav Mahler, that its recourse to worn-out conventions throws a glaring historical light on the social suffering represented by those very conventions themselves, is not one that he is inclined to extend to the formulaic productions of the popular recording industry. There are layers of dialectical complexity in the process by which an electronically generated composition in ruthless 4/4 can provoke, especially when accompanied by ebullient joy or inflamed complaint in the lyric, an emotional catch that feels like insight. Bowie thinks Adorno takes too little account of such sustaining emotional effects, instead relating music to its socio-historical roots, as though it could ever be divorced from them. The claim, however, that 'art as a social practice produces real change in people's lives' returns us to the performance imperative, at the expense of a theory of reception. No concrete examples are given, but the suspicion must linger that what it produces at its most ameliorative is psychological adjustment, not 'real change', which awaits as ever the universally enlightening flash of insight that the Emperor is naked.

In his closing reflections, Bowie turns to the perduring problem of metaphysics. Is there a form of perception, a conscious experience, beyond the enveloping concretion of the everyday world? He would appear to be too ready to attribute to Adorno the conviction *tout court* that the traditional metaphysical life is over. 'That metaphysics is no longer possible becomes the last metaphysics,' he writes in the book on Mahler. 'Announcing the end of metaphysics,' Bowie glosses this, 'is itself metaphysical, because it makes a universal claim.' It isn't the universality, though, that makes it metaphysical, otherwise it would be an ethereal abstraction to assert that all human beings need food. Those moments of Mahler that penetrate the hardened integument of social delusion with recollections of true experience, including experience of the transcendent, in fact belie the standard narrative of progressive material disenchantment. This is why *Negative Dialectics* ends with the postulate that there is a 'solidarity' between non-identitarian thought and metaphysics, at the precise moment that Auschwitz confirms the verdict of the Enlightenment that humanity will need to live without the redemptive mirage that things could be, let alone ought to be, better.

For a Very Short Introduction, Andrew Bowie's text probes impressively into some of the deeper strata of Adorno's philosophy. One might regret the house style of attributing all in-text citations

solely to the edition of the German *Gesammelte Schriften*, rather than more assiduously to the individual texts from which they arise, an omission not really made good in any sound bibliographic fashion by the meagre References section. The newcomer to Adorno, though, will come away with a reasonable conviction of the multivalent complexity of his thinking, and not just the obligatory caution about its intemperance.

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PLATO'S EXCEPTIONAL CITY, LOVE, AND PHILOSOPHER. By Nickolas Pappas. London & NY: Routledge, 2020. 302 pp.

As timely as it is intellectually earnest, the complex of ideas that occupies Nickolas Pappas' recent monograph *Plato's Exceptional City, Love, and Philosopher* elucidates the relationship between several distinct appearances of what he calls the "exceptional items" in the dialogues of Plato. Though this nuanced project is fundamentally intended for specialists, Pappas offers the general reader a handful of industriously woven guiding threads in his introductory chapter, situating his notion of the exceptional within the philosophical and historical contexts of its appearance and relating these components back to Plato's reception by later figures of the Western philosophical tradition. With Kant, for instance, Pappas recalls the metaphorical summary of the former's criticisms of Plato through the image of the ever-rising bird. What makes the example useful to the reader is his subsequent justification for the reference, adding to this that in spite of the temptation to view his own project on comparably lofty terms, there lies a marked difference between his itinerary and Plato's: "Because they are found among ordinary samples of their kind, exceptional phenomena can engage with the objects of experience, not just through empty metaphors. The philosopher spoken of in the *Phaedo* who manifests courage unmixed with fear appears among other people and their adulterated courage, often facing the same dangers they do" (10). Far beyond this dialogue, in which the exceptional presents itself as courage, Pappas' comprehensive approach is fittingly broad in scope, explicating the instantiations of the exceptional in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* as erotic desire, in the *Republic* as the good city and as the person of the philosopher in the *Ion*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*.

Though depicting his accounts of each appearance, and doing so with fidelity, would require much more detail than what has thus far been offered, what lies in common to the approach of each chapter can be briefly clarified by outlining his discussion of tyranny in the book's third chapter. The chapter, "Speaking of tyrants: Gyges and the *Republic's* city," further triangulates the ties between eros, incest and wisdom — a triad that proves highly significant in previous chapters concerning the exceptional form of eros tacit in the speeches given by Diotima and Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. While much of the chapter takes its direction from an analysis of the difference between the accounts of Gyges given by Glaucon in Book I of the *Republic* and in Herodotus's *Histories*, Pappas carefully situates his reading of the former's speech downstream from his interpretation of Cephalus's opening remarks. Pappas' claim here is not simply that "old age brings calm and freedom," but by extension, "that a life governed by sexual desire is a mad one; more broadly that sexual desire resembles political despotism" (120). Though the commendable development of Pappas' argument certainly owes to his scholarly rigor, it is additionally the product of his ability to continually write in the shadow of his initial premises at later points in the chapter. Novel as the reading might be, its conclusions are not drawn from his intentions but rather from employing the historical conventions of his source material as the parameters of his approach. As Pappas reminds his readers,

“the ancient popular mind...puts tyranny outside normal politics and outside legitimate sexuality. The force of this assumption causes even the stories of tyrants’ innocence to have to claim that innocence” (111). This historical point here substantiates the subtle philosophical one. More specifically, it highlights the multiple levels at work in the exceptionalism that is characteristic of the tyrant’s soul: “what a soul unlawfully desires in its dreams can include *théria* ‘beasts.’...the tyrannical soul lets itself indulge those dreams. The erotic tendency in the tyrant finally expresses itself in bestiality” (113). This moment in the text is one of several that both furthers Pappas’s intervention and demonstrates his ability to connection between the various levels on which Plato’s dialogues simultaneously operate. In this manner, *Plato’s Exceptional City, Love, and Philosopher* echoes Glaucon’s attempt to simultaneously persuade his audience of the dangers of lust, moderate the explicit content of his own speech and highlight its metaphorical link to the soul and city. Like Glaucon, Pappas’s work is similarly an accomplishment in the balance it strikes between his shrewdness as a reader of Plato and the illustration of his insights through the clarity of his prose.

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AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY. By Andrew Bowie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 296 pp.

In the opening chapter of the *Aesthetic Dimensions of Modern Philosophy*, Andrew Bowie puts forth a novel reading of Descartes that begins to adumbrate the division between cognitive and aesthetic judgements which in modernity, Bowie claims, proves to navigate the latter’s trajectory as a discipline. For Bowie, the process of Cartesian doubt lies and, in fact, demarcates the intersection between the arts and sciences; on the one hand, these “sceptical reflections follow from the emergence of modern scientific method, which puts the wisdom of the Bible and the Greeks into doubt by showing that many received explanations of natural phenomena are untenable” (30). Bowie finds in the *Meditations* attempt to mold an ontological foundation for the burgeoning natural sciences — “a grounding which turns out, though, to be elusive” — an elusiveness both symptomatic of modernity’s broader currents and pliable to the thesis of his project (29). On the other hand, he writes, “It is this elusiveness that I want to connect to aesthetics, which, rather than seeking to establish a stable subject–object relationship that can ground knowledge, responds to the shifting ways in which subjective and objective relate” (30). The passage instantiates a twofold claim of *Aesthetic Dimensions* that, firstly, a dynamism has characterized the nature of the relationship between subject and object and, secondly, why this relationship subsequently takes on its various guises as described by Bowie. To Bowie’s credit, locating this rift between a scientific sense of precision and a capacity of the work of art to preclude hermeneutic closure in Descartes indirectly reframes the divide between continental and analytic philosophy as a gradual, rather than recent, fissure. Such a perspective brings with it an additionally welcomed understanding of this divide from the vantage point of the objects of study relevant to each. “If maths is one form in which modern philosophy seeks transcendence,” Bowie remarks, “the other form, as various varieties of Romanticism and aestheticism suggest, is art. This is evident in the often radically differing understandings of language that have predominated in these approaches” — a difference he rightly sees manifest between Frege on the one hand and continental approaches to hermeneutics, on the other (9).

However, one consequence of describing and explaining disciplinary focus in terms of these objects is that such an approach threatens to attribute the second order effects downstream from each object of study to its respective discipline. This is occasionally hinted at by Bowie’s treatment of the

penchant for assuredness characteristic of the analytic tradition: “The latter claim can only be denied if one maintains that ‘reality’ is only what the physical sciences reveal, the position we questioned in terms of the notion of ‘world’. The very fact that such a claim can so dominate philosophical debate, and has effects in many domains of social, political, and cultural life, is itself a symptom of what this book has sought to question. . . . this claim itself is not a natural scientific claim and so involves meta-physical commitments outside its own scope, as well as having social and political effects by obscuring the kind of truth that is only accessible through art” (207–08). Whether claims regarding scientific objectivity are meant to extend beyond the parameters in which some fact may be understood as objective within the scope of such parameters and whether that claim remains intelligible “outside of its own scope” remain separate affairs. Although Bowie is right to point out that the particular world picture tacitly envisioned by such claims is not always made explicit, the direct contact between truth as it appears in this framework and “the kind of truth that is only accessible through art,” as well as the means by which the conceptual shape of the former can take hold of and obscure the non-conceptual shape of the latter remains to be elucidated.

This does not, however, outweigh the scholarly merit of the book, which is prominently displayed in the chapters devoted to Heidegger and Adorno. As is frequently the case, Bowie’s acumen on Heidegger is displayed with prominence. This comes to the fore directly through the focus of the book’s sixth chapter on the Heidegger–Cassirer debate, its reception and the ecological components of Heidegger’s discussion of the strife between earth and world in “The Origin of the Work of Art” in tandem with a number of additional topics in Heidegger scholarship. Bowie’s longstanding eminence on Heidegger’s relationship to aesthetics indirectly provides the reader with a newfound clarity that demystifies Heidegger’s claims while separating them from the plausible interpretations with which they are often conflated.

This penultimate chapter makes apparent the philosophical accomplishment of *Aesthetic Dimensions of Modern Philosophy*. More broadly, Bowie’s shrewd grasp of the history of philosophy allows him to highlight the repetition of philosophical debates whose recurrence often owes to a mistaken understanding of this history as an antiquated moment bereft of contemporary significance. “Again,” he writes, “we end up with versions of materialism/realism versus idealism . . . and with the impasses of much modern epistemology” (35). Bowie takes care to delimit the scope of this problematic, often doing so through an extended engagement with the lexicon of Jürgen Habermas — a gesture which proves particularly useful when partitioning between cognitive and aesthetic judgements. Such an approach ultimately offers a substantive contribution to one of the central questions of the book and of our philosophical moment: “How, then, can we understand the sense that makes aesthetics so important, in ways which do not merely relegate it to the arbitrarily subjective, but also do not seek to give it the same objective status as warranted scientific claims?” (7).

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BUDDHIST ETHICS: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION. By Jay L. Garfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 249 pp.

In the Preface to his *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration*, Jay L. Garfield suggests to the reader that the frame through which we are to read his work explicitly avoids a comparative approach to ethics as broadly construed in Eastern and Western philosophy. This is a subtle point that reads as a mere suggestion before it does an intention that foregrounds and directs his project. However, as the book progresses it not only becomes clear that the latter holds sway but, by exten-

sion, that for this topic in particular to hone and deploy a methodologically non-comparative approach requires as much intellectual rigor as does the explication of the topic itself. Though Garfield's intention "to introduce Western philosophers to Buddhist thought...in order that they might be better equipped to address Buddhist literature" is by no means unique to the Buddhist Philosophy for Philosophers series in which it appears, his attempt to avoid "systematically identify[ing] Buddhist ideas with Western ideas" is an accomplishment in philosophical erudition and instructional clarity that proves worthy of attention (ix).

One of the more laudable examples in which Garfield carefully avoids construing this distinction in terms of opposition occurs within his account of moral phenomenology. His initial clarification of what falls within and outside the scope of this notion proves to be as interesting conceptually as it is useful to the novice reader. Garfield devotes a footnote to this task, part of which he uses to distance himself from similar applications of the term in different disciplines: "I am using the term *moral phenomenology* in a very specific sense here, denoting an approach to ethics in which the goal is the cultivation of a distinct way of experiencing oneself and others in the world, or a mode of comportment toward the world" (pp. 21-2, n. 6). A lot proves to hinge on the experience and mode of comportment that, for Garfield, are cultivated in and particular to the structure of Buddhist ethics. Moreover, Garfield's explication of moral phenomenology through these constituent parts animates his additional claim that, even more so than metaphysics or epistemology, it is the domain of ethics that animates our ordinary experience of the world. Garfield suggests that "the initial state" from which this phenomenology begins "is one of bondage by psychopathological confusion about one's own nature and the nature of the world around one" (25-6). Yet the path one follows through the course of this experience "culminates in a state of awakened existence" — a state in which what is finally cultivated is the capacity to experience and perceive the world through an ethical lens that he reminds us is singular to Buddhism (26).

An example offered in the sixth chapter of Shantideva's *How to Lead an Awakened Life* elucidates the purview of awakened existence and intertwines neatly with his claim that ethics underwrites our perception of the everyday. Shantideva, for Garfield, "argues that we can come to see those who appear to harm us as in fact benefiting us by offering us the opportunity to practice patience, issuing in a response of gratitude rather than a reaction of anger" (26). Cultivating the ability to augment one's immediate situational comportment is not simply a mental phenomenon. Because it is adaptive to the present in which it is practiced, Garfield observes that such an ethical lens interacts with the present in which it is deployed and thereby alters the outcomes eventually brought forth. "Ethical practice," Garfield writes, "is about the transformation not in the first instance of what we *do*, but of how we *see*" (23). In other words, because the path that leads to awakened existence offers a view so radically different from our ordinary situational perception we might not register this experience as similar in any regards and, as a result, can find a different way of engaging with it.

Though this is just one applied instance of Garfield's framework for moral phenomenology, I have included this case study in order to highlight his capacity to differentiate between ethics in Buddhist and Western philosophy without collapsing this distinction into comparison or opposition. Here, like many other moments in *Buddhist Ethics*, Garfield is able to maneuver between one tradition and another by pushing the terms with which the reader is acquainted to point at which further clarification requires recourse to an external vantage point. Articulating the limits of the familiar provides a point of departure that keeps in sight the vast difference between both approaches to ethics — an accomplishment that, fittingly, echoes the goal that he suggests lies at the heart of Buddhist moral theory "not in the...the development of new ways of *acting*, but rather new ways of *experiencing the world*" (32).

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PHILOSOPHY, MYSTICISM, AND THE POLITICAL: ESSAYS ON DANTE. By Massimo Cacciari. Edited and with an introduction by Alessandro Carrera. Translated by Giorgio Mobili. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2021. 185 pp.

Massimo Cacciari (born 1944) is one of the most popular Italian philosophers, politicians, and intellectuals of his generation. Much of his philosophical career has been centred on the concept of “negative thought”, inspired by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and is conveyed through a dialogue between philosophical and theological reflection. He has published numerous books on both “negative thought” and the relationship between philosophy and theology, including *Krisis, Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* (1976), *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione* (1977), *L'angelo necessario* (1986), *Dell'inizio* (1990), and most recently *Il lavoro dello spirito* (2020).

Philosophy, Mysticism, and the Political: Essays on Dante is a collection of all the essays that Cacciari has written on Dante Alighieri's writings and their reception. Structured in nine chapters, the book singles out three main topics that recur in Dante's works – philosophy, mysticism, and politics – the relationships among which Cacciari has explored extensively throughout his scholarly career.

Given the genesis of the book, each chapter stands alone and there is no sequence from one chapter to the next. They touch on disparate themes (e.g. Dante's and Giotto's interpretations of Saint Francis, Dante's view on Ulysses' journey, Dante's idea of divine perception, Dante's concept of the ineffable, Dante's interpretation of intellectual love, Dante's philosophy of language, Dante's political theology, and the reception of Dante's works in Germany), often broadly covered, and have dissimilar lengths. A further imbalance arises from the fact that the first five chapters and the seventh are focused on the *Divine Comedy* (*Divina Commedia*) and only the sixth deals primarily with *On the Eloquence in the Vernacular* (*De vulgari eloquentia*). Cacciari's erudition provides the reader with a glimpse into the multifaceted structure of Dante's thought. However, some of the topics treated herein are too vast and complex (such as Dante's philosophy of language, Dante's political theology, and the reception of Dante's output in Germany) to be addressed in a few pages. In these instances, the chapters are more discursive than analytical, and often the reader has to reach his or her own conclusions.

The first chapter (the book's longest), “Double Portrait: Saint Francis of Assisi in Dante and Giotto”, retraces the significance of Saint Francis for both Dante's and Giotto's works. In this chapter, Cacciari (p. 24) asks “Can the Francis of the double church of Assisi be understood in analogy with the Francis of Dante?” To answer this question, Cacciari compares and contrasts Dante's and Giotto's interpretations of the figure of Saint Francis, focusing on several themes, especially humility, history versus legend, and poverty.

According to Cacciari, the originality of the theology of the *Paradiso* revolves around the figure of Saint Francis and, more precisely, his humility. Dante regarded Saint Francis as a man of his century, making the figure of Francis historical. On the other hand, Giotto represented Saint Francis as a religious man who preaches to the birds. Consequently, in Giotto's frescoes Saint Francis is a legendary instead of an historical man. Thus, whereas for Giotto history and legend are intertwined, for Dante these two dimensions are distinct.

Another topic Cacciari (p. 47) addresses in this chapter is Francis' poverty: “Poverty constitutes the very character and destiny of Francis' legacy”. Giotto's Francis is an emblem of popular religion, miracles, and poverty. For this reason, Giotto exalted poverty in his frescoes. Similarly, in the *Comedy*, Dante endorsed Francis' idea of poverty. However, according to Cacciari, both Giotto and Dante did not fully understand Francis' poverty, that is, the joy of poverty. In fact, Francis' joy of poverty and suffering is absent both in Giotto's Assisi frescos and in Dante's *Comedy*.

In chapter two, titled “The ‘Sin’ of Ulysses”, Cacciari identifies Dante’s view on Ulysses’ character and expresses one himself. According to Dante, an issue with Ulysses’ personality – and the source of his sin – is the combination of inordinate love and immoderate intelligence, inasmuch as “the former leads the lovers to ruin” and the latter “brings ruin to the false brethren” (Cacciari, p. 62). This is why Dante places Ulysses in the *Inferno*, in the eighth Bolgia of the eighth Circle (where those who have given out fraudulent counsel reside), thereby condemning Ulysses as a dishonest adviser.

However, considering Ulysses’ temperament, Cacciari prefers to talk about error rather than sin. This is compelling because discussing the concept of error anchors the character of Ulysses in its original Greek context. However, the reader would have benefited more if it was justified by clearer and more well-founded statements. Cacciari (p. 66) writes:

In Greek parlance, we could say: Ulysses does not sin, he *misses the target*. His is not sin but Greek *hamartia* (“error”). He does not orient himself by the reason and purpose of knowledge; in fact, he misses knowledge’s goal by misconceiving its foundation. Even the meaning to be attributed to Ulysses’ unstoppable longing should be carefully understood. It is not a commandment enjoining moderation and temperance, but rather the necessity to keep the ship of inquiry (Dante’s is a ship, Ulysses’ only a *bark*) well oriented and well steered. Inevitably, then, the error of intellect produces a catastrophe on the plane of ethics and of religious conscience.

Ulysses’ “error” would consist in his lack of goal, in other words, according to Cacciari (p. 69), his journey has no real purpose:

He wishes to “gain experience of the world” (“divenir del mondo esperto”, *Inf.* XXVI, 98) without trying to determine from time to time what his end will be. He “touches” several places only to abandon them at once. He leaves behind what he encounters without really getting to know it.

Cacciari’s view is grounded on Dante’s idea that, in his journey, Ulysses does not gain any real experience. He just wants to experiment. In this respect, Ulysses’ journey is very different from Dante’s journey (Dante the character in the *Comedy*, not Dante the author), which, as Cacciari points out, instead resembles those of Saint Paul and Aeneas. The comparison between the journeys of Ulysses, Paul, Aeneas, and Dante is interesting and fruitful, but it is a pity that Cacciari did not have the space to further explore the subject; that exploration would have allowed the reader to better understand Dante’s points of reference on the theme of travel and the different ways of conceiving it.

In chapter three, titled “Dante’s Divine Perception (*Aesthesis Theia*)”, Cacciari investigates Dante’s concept of divine perception. On Dante’s account, light plays a special role in divine perception because it “reveals the perfect merging of divine and human in the figure of the Son, thereby turning into a perfectly deifying Light” (Cacciari, p. 86). Cacciari (p. 91) continues,

Platonically, Light is the first Energy, that which makes possible the connection between seer and seen, and in whose unveiling every intuition and every word take place. A light that is perfectly sensible, and at the same time transcending every limitation. The Taboric light is also perfectly sensible. And all our lights arrange themselves according to this one Light, lights from the Light (*lumina de Lumine*), they are coordinated with the Light, just like the Light is coordinated with the Father whom it reveals and whom, however, no one ever saw.

In this sense, Beatrice is an important symbol: “Her smile signals the very merriment (*hilaritas*) of the divine Light trinitarily conceived, that is, the Light of God-as-Relation (*Deus Relatio*), of God-as-Love (*Theos Agape*)” (Cacciari, p. 87). Therefore, Beatrice’s smile leads to the divine and, for this reason, she plays a crucial role in Dante’s journey.

In chapter four, titled “The Concrete Ineffable: The Last Cantos of the *Commedia*”, Cacciari’s aim is to analyse Dante’s ability to intertwine hearing, seeing, and speech in the *Paradiso* and to show how Dante represents the ineffable, that is, a vision that “surpasses any predicative-demon-

strative language” (Cacciari, p. 103). Though the concept of the ineffable is well explained in the chapter, Cacciari neglects to show how Dante intertwines hearing, seeing, and speech and how “the different ways in which each of these dimensions is articulated, and [...] the different forms in which these different ways interweave with each other” (Cacciari, p. 93). In this sense, this part lacks both clarity and a strong argument. Some longer excerpts than those provided by Cacciari from Dante’s *Paradiso*, accurately interpreted by the author, as well as a more solid theological contextualisation, would have helped the reader to follow the author’s reasoning.

Chapter five, “Dante’s *Intellectual Love*”, deals with Dante’s idea of love. As Cacciari (p. 107) indicates, “in the *Paradiso*, Love is declared to be the *substance* of God, and [...] for this reason its energy can achieve the *excessus* and win it all”. Therefore, love is the main theme of the *Paradiso*. Using Cacciari’s words, the *Paradiso* shows “how the mind surpasses itself (*si trasmodi*; see Par. XXX, 19) and how such supreme metamorphosis is conceivable only through the *violence* of love” (Cacciari, p. 107). In this sense, according to Dante, God represents “the highest Cause, loving Cause, both final and efficient, unconditional Love” (Cacciari, p. 108).

Chapter six, “Latin and Vernacular in the *De vulgari eloquentia*”, breaks the continuity of the analysis of the *Comedy* and investigates Dante’s philosophy of language in *On the Eloquence in the Vernacular*, where Dante examines the common speech. Dante expresses the necessity of establishing a distinguished vernacular to express ourselves clearly, with skilful eloquence and the utmost rigour, in every aspect of everyday life (e.g. in academia, the courts, the tribunals, politics, etc.).

In this chapter, Cacciari identifies the most innovative insights of Dante’s philosophy of language: (i) the idea of a “sign” that entwines the sensible with the rational; (ii) the notion that language originated in a “sign”; (iii) the notion of the “becoming” of languages and therefore that there is no “sacred” language; and (iv) the notion of the “form of language”, that is, the idea that there is an innate structure in the human brain that allows us to learn language from the “matrix” but that, as Cacciari (p. 115) affirms, “the multiplicity of idioms is a function of change (*vicissitudo*) and human will”. Cacciari concludes that Dante’s philosophy of language would be the “precursor” to Noam Chomsky’s theory of generative grammar.

Chapter seven, “On Dante’s Political Theology”, returns to the *Comedy* (and to a certain extent also deals with *On Monarchy* (*De Monarchia*)) and outlines Dante’s idea of political theology. According to Cacciari, the connection between politics and theology makes Dante a *seer* and his poem *sacred*. Dante defends the idea that salvation can come only if the religious and political authorities fulfil their roles perfectly in both dimensions. Therefore, Papacy and Empire should complement each other: “The City is both city of man (*civitas homini*) and city of God (*civitas Dei*) and contains in itself all the dynamics that issue from such duplicity” (Cacciari, p. 120). It follows that, as Cacciari’s main argument states, Dante’s political discourse can only be understood in relation to its theological foundation.

The last two chapters deal with Dante’s fortune in Germany. In chapter eight, titled “A Brief Note on the German Reception of Dante”, Cacciari broadly traces the reception of Dante’s works in German poetry and philosophy. The result of Cacciari’s research is that “in the German-speaking world, Dante emerges as the paragon of a grandiose *epic*, in opposition to both the Baroque and an Enlightenment perceived as too cold and intellectualistic, devoid of religious strength” (Cacciari, p. 133). Consequently, the fortune of Dante in Germany coincides with the era of Goethe, between Romanticism and Idealism. The last chapter, “Schelling’s Dante”, is more limited in scope, concentrating on the importance of Dante’s output in Schelling’s philosophy. According to Cacciari, the relationship between Schelling and Dante is critical to understanding Schelling’s philosophical system. However, this topic is addressed in a very general way, leaving out a sound explanation of Schelling’s indebtedness to Dante.

To conclude, Cacciari’s book offers original and thought-provoking perspectives from which to engage with the complex and crucial poet and thinker that Dante Alighieri was. Despite the weaknesses outlined above and the fact that Dante’s works have been studied for a long time by

numerous distinguished scholars and specialists, Cacciari succeeded in demonstrating novel ways to appreciate the richness, profundity, and originality of Dante's opus, as well as the importance of continuing to engage with his writings.

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TAGORE AND YEATS: A POSTCOLONIAL RE-ENVISIONING. By Amrita Ghosh and Elizabeth Brewer Redwine (Eds.). Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2022. xvi, 220 pp.

Many readers consider Tagore and Yeats to be two beacons of anti-colonialism; cosmopolitan as well as champions of the causes they advocated. They look at their friendship in genteel terms, calling out the fallout rather unfortunate. This anthology aims to fill the lacuna left in studying the causal trajectory their symbiotic relationship took thereby becoming an *initium* for discussion, debate, criticism, and comparison albeit following a decentralized exegesis. The foreword to the anthology succinctly sums up the content – the essays use “theoretical, literary critical, biographical, historical, art historical, even sartorial” (Ramazani, ix) analysis for a relational understanding between the two poets and how their assimilation in curating an anti-colonial literature impacted each poet's profession.

Amrita Ghosh and Elizabeth Brewer Redwine gloss over the beneficial equation shared by the poets in the introduction and call the anthology a ‘postcolonial re-envisioning.’ They argue that the essays look at the two poets not by glorifying one's identity at the cost of the other, but by juxtaposing their paradoxical equation within a “collaborative artistry” (Ghosh and Redwine, 1).

Divided into three broad themes, the first section of the anthology is titled “Tagore, Yeats, Translation and Appropriation,” and contains two essays. The first essay, written by Amardeep Singh, ‘(Un)Translatable Authorship: Positioning Yeats’ ‘Preface’ and the Poetry of Tagore,’ deals with the problematics of translation, especially the poetics of Tagore with poetry being rather untranslatable. It also highlights how the generous addition of Yeats’ Preface to *Gitanjali* prefigured Tagore in the Western intellect but instead of uplifting Tagore, helped in elevating Yeats’ career in Europe. Tagore, in the critic's opinion, was lost in translation; modelled for European consumption with Yeats’ chaperone which has since been difficult to overcome and certainly raises doubts about his possible re-examination without Yeats’ overshadowing influence.

Similarly, the second essay, ‘Translation at the Abbey Theatre in 1913: The World Premier of Rabindranath Tagore's the Post Office,’ by Barry Sheils takes a step further in discussing Tagore's rise as a translated Indian by taking recourse to the staging of his play *Daakghar* as ‘The Post Office’ at Dublin's Abbey Theatre on 17 May 1913 through the Borgesian paradox. This paper argues how literature which transcends nations are translated literature. Reclaiming space by the effaced translators and the local import of linguistic nuances are seen as prerequisites to the strategy of global exchange, which is not always easy, especially in case of self-translation.

The second set of essays, “Representation, Subalternity, and Transnational Collaboration” contain three essays, namely, ‘Hybrid Performances: Tagore, Yeats, Politics and the Practice of Cosmopolitanism’ by Louise Blakeney Williams, ‘Tagore's China, Yeats’ Orient’ by Gregory B. Lee, and ‘Tagore, Yeats and the Poetics of Subalternity’ by Sirshendu Majumdar. Williams’ essay expounds the cosmopolitanism of the two poets. Tagore's hybridity as a poet depends on his personality, carefully crafted to become cosmopolitan. Yeats shares Tagore's idealism and is helped by Tagore in achieving his own. While Tagore's cosmopolitanism rests on his appearance, Yeats’ rests on his performance.

Lee's essay looks at this cosmopolitanism through the poets' relation with another country, China. The Chinese perceive Yeats as a representative of Irish renaissance but visualise Tagore as an anti-colonial force in the making. The fact that Yeats' interest in China has been purely oriental shaped this idea of him. Unlike Yeats, Tagore is involved with the Chinese writers, even though strong opposition to his art is seen later. The essayist states that the decolonial apparatus that Yeats' advocated was purely logocentric; therefore, his idea of a decolonised China differs from Tagore's.

In the last essay of this section, Majumdar talks about the element of 'subalternity' evident in both the poets. While Yeats' subalternity is reincarnated in the postcolonial matrix, Tagore's is not, largely due to the ways they have written back to the coloniser. He shows the paths these poets adopted in exerting their artistic autonomy, which at times have alienated them from the very causes they have been espousing while also driving home the element of "cosmopolitan freedom" (Majumdar, 141).

"Performativity, Art: Modernism and Postcolonial," the last section of the anthology talks largely about the performative aspects of the two poets. This performativity is manifold. In the first essay from this section, 'Translating from the Peripheries: Rabindranath Tagore, William Butler Yeats, Automatism and Late-stage Aesthetics' Victor Vargas delves into the aesthetics of poetics that the two poets perform, both in their creative oeuvres as well as personal lives. While Yeats leans more towards a "paranormal-oriented mysticism," Tagore engages in an inner spiritual experience of "psychic automatism" which have brought them closer instead of making them distant.

Elizabeth Brewer Redwine takes her cue from this point onwards and opens another aspect of performativity, that of the 'self' in her essay, 'Meeting the British: Yeats, Tagore, and Self Fashioning.' While Yeats' performance of identity has been considerably ignored, Tagore's has been exaggerated. The reception of the two poets as 'others' in the West has similarly been different. Yeats' awareness of playing his part helped him introduce Tagore to the British readers. Both poets have come to represent their cultures, which is complicated especially in case of Tagore because of Yeats' misleading tendency to homogenise a country vastly diverse and declare Tagore its sole champion.

Amrita Ghosh wraps up the anthology with 'Tagore's Radical Art and Yeats' Intermedial Dance-Theatre: Re-evaluating Eurocentric Modernism,' where she talks about performativity of the poets through the paintings they created. Tagore's art is modernistic and radical, opposed to the forms advocated by the Bengal school art, while Yeats' uses ekphrasis in his art and poems. The poets looked outside their niches to formulate a grander aesthetics for their art in order to put it out of the Eurocentric modernism. To this end, Yeats has collaborated with the Japanese dancer Michio Ito creating in his drama, "a certain modernism for him, similar to some of the resistant dynamics in Tagore's art" (Ghosh, 204).

Joseph Lennon's afterword sums up the themes dealt with in the essays. Tagore and Yeats, through their creative enterprises advocate an outward looking and inclusive dialectic of literature, even though their literary careers grew during times of rising nationalist fervour. In carving their own stories, each has benefited from the other. In the larger nexus of things, studying them alongside one another brings to fore the need of a cosmopolitan advocacy of art which is not tethered within obsolete, xenophobic discourses.

The collection does not limit itself to studying the poets' artistic pursuits alone, but examines their personalities stripped off their creative genius as well. Tagore, because of his associations with the West, is recreated within a tradition of Eurocentric modernism. At home, he ends up being just a major Bengali poet. Yeats, on the other hand, is seen more in the rising Modernism of Britain of the 20th Century rather than of Ireland. Thus, their re-envisioning within a postcolonial framework is befitting and indeed, needed.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN AESTHETICS: HISTORY, THEORY AND THEORETICIANS. By Mini Chandran and Sreenath V. S. New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2021. xii + 218 pp.

According to Mini Chandran and Sreenath V. S., the aim of their book, *An Introduction to Indian Aesthetics: History, Theory and Theoreticians*, is to provide the reader with “an introduction to the world of Sanskrit poetics, explaining its major concepts lucidly for even those who do not know Sanskrit.” (xii) This goal is satisfied, as the authors navigate the dense and rich Sanskrit literature with mastery and elegance, to the point that they can render challenging concepts in a particularly succinct and clear manner. This achievement, which is the first merit of the book, is worth noting from the outset.

The book is divided into eight chapters, preceded by a foreword by Sheldon Pollock and a preface by the authors. These chapters are followed by two useful appendixes, respectively concerned with the genres, and the categories of drama in Sanskrit literature. In addition, the authors provide the reader with ‘suggested readings’ and an index, both of which are welcome to expand one’s knowledge of the subject and navigate easily through the book.

In chapter one, ‘Indian Aesthetics: A Historical and Conceptual Overview,’ which shares with chapter 8 (‘Conclusion’) the fact of being the most theoretical part of the book, Mini Chandran and Sreenath present the scope of their work, namely *kāvyaśāstra*, i.e., the Sanskrit aesthetics of literary composition. In this last expression, the term *aesthetics* is traditionally understood as the systematic exploration of beauty, by which *kāvyaśāstra* is on the one hand the formal study of literature, and on the other hand, the practical study of what makes good literature. The authors then present the six schools of thought of Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra*, namely *alaṅkāra*, *rīti*, *guṇa*, *vakrokti*, *dhvani*, and *aucitya*. Apart from chapter 2 devoted to *rasa* or “aesthetic pleasure,” which the authors consider “the theory in classical Sanskrit literary studies” (33. Original emphasis), each of the remaining chapters deals with one of these concepts or schools of thought.

Chapter 3 examines ‘*Alaṅkāra*,’ a term that was originally used in Sanskrit poetics to “signify what was conventionally regarded as figures of speech, and... to denote anything that adds beauty to the poem.” (63) The authors emphasize the fact that the concept of *alaṅkāra* was so important to Sanskrit thinking that it finally came “to represent ‘literary theory’ itself.” (63). In any case, *alaṅkāra* is concerned with beauty, whether as a creation of the poet or as a concept in itself.

Chapter 4 inquires about ‘*Rīti, Guṇas, and Doṣas*.’ Vāmana, the main contributor to the first concept, defines it as the “soul of poetry” in his *Kāvyaśāstra*. As such, *rīti* is related to *guṇas*, namely, according to the “working definition” offered by the authors, any “factor that enhanced *rasa*,” (91) while conversely, *doṣas* refer to any factor that reduced *rasa*.

In chapter 5 Mini Chandran and Sreenath discuss ‘*Dhvani*,’ i.e., “the ability of a word, a sentence, or a literary composition to suggest a meaning, a *rasa* or an *alaṅkāra* beyond what is explicitly stated.” (97) This discussion allows the authors to present the different forms of *dhvani* and the different forms of poetic composition. The chapter includes an important section on the role of the reader regarding the “actualization of *dhvani*.” (118)

Chapter 6 takes on ‘*Vakrokti*,’ “which literally means ‘deviant use of language’.” (123) The authors also note that ancient Indian theorists of poetry maintained that *vakrokti* “is one distinctive feature that helped you to recognize a *kāvya* when you saw or read it.” (123) However, none of these theorists “made *vakrokti* the primary focus of their inquiry.” (129) Nonetheless, the chapter unfolds the six categories of *vakratā*, as outlined by Kuntaka in his *Vakroktijīvita*.

In chapter 7, they then turn to ‘*Aucitya*’ or “property,” another concept that “had always been central to the treatment of literature in Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra*.” (145) The authors point out that “the Indian concept of *aucitya* corresponds to the Greek and Roman classical concept of

decorum.” (159) Thus, *aucitya* is a concept that bridges Greek, Roman and Sanskrit literary endeavors, skillfully brought together by Mini Chandran and Sreenath under the idea of “classical literature.” (160)

The conclusion (chapter 8), finally, primarily discusses the current relevance of Sanskrit aesthetics, touches upon its critical nature, and the relation between the “drastic downturn” (170) of *kāvyaśāstra* and the phenomenon of colonization in India. The authors also return to the question of the role of the reader in Sanskrit literary criticism and ultimately argue for the current relevance of the study of Sanskrit theories.

It is worth noticing that in presenting Sanskrit literary criticism, the authors are true to the subtitle of their book, as they are equally attentive to the major exponents of each theory or concept, as well as the history of their scholarly discussion by other thinkers and practitioners through the ages, until their decline. In doing so, the book offers a detailed account of each concept presented to an extent that fortunately contradicts the authors’ opening euphemism of their work as a “bird’s-eye view” (xii). In fact, the book is a dense, rich and erudite presentation of Sanskrit literary criticism, albeit devoid of unnecessary technicality or jargon.

The practical result of this skillful and informed treatment and engagement with Sanskrit aesthetics of literary composition is the authors’ active demonstration that one is perfectly legitimate, beyond the clichés and other prejudices on non-Western premodern thinking in the domain of human sciences, to speak of Sanskrit literary criticism not only as a discipline, but moreover as having an impressive and long-lasting history, a point made by Sheldon Pollock in his foreword to the book.

However, as impressive as it is, the book suffers from a few shortcomings that do not diminish its quality and interest, although they are worth noting. First, although the authors are true to the subtitle of their book, they are not completely true to its title, which is said to deal with ‘Indian Aesthetics.’ In fact, Mini Chandran and Sreenath are only interested in Sanskrit literary criticism, despite their own remark that “contrary to popular perception, the term ‘Indian aesthetics’ refers to not just Sanskrit poetics but also the well-developed poetic system of Tamil.” (xi-xii) But insofar as the authors say nothing about other poetic systems of ancient India, the title of their book is somewhat misleading as it is broader than the task that is actually undertaken.

Second, the authors make an appreciable effort to connect Sanskrit aesthetics with modern Western literature. Without questioning the appropriateness of such a relationship on which there is undoubtedly a lot to say, it is noticeable that the authors primarily illustrate Sanskrit aesthetic concepts and theories in the modern world with examples they find almost exclusively in the traditional Western corpus (see 33, 44, 76, 97, 106, 117, 124–125, 133, 139, 152, etc.). Colonization put aside, it is not always easy to understand how the theory discussed (Indian) and the examples provided (Western) come into a relation that is justified other than by the (subjective) action of the authors. This difficulty carries with it another one concerning the very nature of Sanskrit aesthetic thinking in relation to our present. In fact, it seems that the authors unwittingly argue that there is no such thing as a “modern Indian aesthetics,” especially from the perspective offered by Sanskrit thinking, a limitation that may explain the necessity to refer to Western playwrights/plays, poets/poems and novelists/novels for illustrative purposes. The book, indeed, struggles to highlight the current relevance of Sanskrit aesthetics beyond the notable mention of Ayyappa Paniker in the conclusion (186–187).

From a different perspective, this situation speaks of the authors’ conservatism about ‘Indian aesthetics,’ which aligns somewhat and more or less intentionally with the conservatism of the Indian caste system. On this last point, readers will make their own judgment about the grounds and implications of one section in the conclusion of the book, where Mini Chandran and Sreenath, in a manner that can be related to that of Karl Rosenkranz in his *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (1853), assert that “While it is correct to assume that Sanskrit was spoken only by the upper

castes, it is wrong to conclude that *this world* [that of Sanskrit aesthetics] *has space only for what is beautiful.*" (177. Emphasis added)

Despite these difficulties, it is, however, fair to say that overall, the book presents itself as a valuable introduction to the vast and interesting domain of Sanskrit literary criticism, thus encouraging the reader to engage more intensively with this fascinating subject.

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ECOCRITICISM AND CHINESE LITERATURE: IMAGINED LANDSCAPES AND REAL LIVED SPACES. By Riccardo Moratto, Nicoletta Pesaro and Di-Kai Chao. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. 209 pp.

As a literary and cultural criticism tendency, ecocriticism was formed in the United States in the mid-1990s, and then appeared in many countries around the world. Although the definition of ecocriticism varies, it is generally accepted that ecocriticism is a literary and artistic criticism approach that addresses ecological issues from the perspective of literary criticism. On the one hand, it addresses the deep relationship between literature and natural environment, and on the other hand, it concerns the internal relationship between literature and art and social ecology, cultural ecology, and spiritual ecology.

It is an important trend of today's ecocriticism to discover and introduce the resources of Eastern civilizations. Schopenhauer, Huxley, Toynbee, Ralston and many other thinkers and ecophilosophers have emphasized the importance of Eastern ecological wisdom. In recent years, Harvard University Press has successively published a number of books, such as *Daoism and Ecology* (2001), *Confucianism and Ecology* (1998), *Buddhism and Ecology* (1997), carrying out in-depth exploration into the great value of ancient Eastern ecological thought. An increasing number of ecological thought and ecological culture researchers realize that the exploration and introduction of Eastern ecological wisdom will probably provide new ideas for ecological philosophy, ecological ethics, ecological literature and ecological criticism.

This book *Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature: Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces* is just an effort in this regard. As a compilation of eco-criticism about oriental writings, it focuses on modern and contemporary Chinese literature. As emphasized by Wang Fuzhi, a master of Chinese classical poetry theory, a very important goal of literature and art is *qing* (情) and *jing* (境).

Combining these two classical literary concepts, this volume, taking a new ecological perspective, examines their contexts and different ecological dimensions based on dozens of works in different genres. It points out that there is an inseparable connection between nature, human beings and literary writing, and analyzes how this connection is manifested in traditional, modern and contemporary Chinese literature. This collection of essays reinterprets the concept of Chinese classical literature from contemporary and eco-criticism lens, hoping to provide new materials and perspectives for eco-criticism and expand the depth and breadth of eco-criticism.

This volume consists mainly of two parts: (1) Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature, and (2) Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces. Each part is further made up of seven chapters.

Chapter 1 "Trees Keep Time: An Ecocritical Approach to Literary Temporality" analyses the emotional topography of human-tree relationships and their effect on narrative temporality with a focus on the works by Chu T'ien-hsin's (朱天心), Dung Kai-cheung's (董启章) and Alai (阿来). The author argues that plants, trees for example, have always been powerful symbols of place and core images for defining and representing time.

Chapter 2 “Transcultural Landscape and Modernity in a Feng Zhi Sonnet” examines the sonnet of Feng Zhi, a modern and contemporary Chinese poet who reinterprets the poetic classical tradition of poetic scenes in the modern era when man is disconnected from nature. It explores the relationship between the transformation of language, prosody, and landscape conception in modern Chinese poetry.

According to Chapter 3 “Nonhuman Poetics (By Way of Wang Guowei)”, although there are quantities of descriptions of landscape and nature in Chinese classical poetry, nonhuman entities, however, are seldom touched in traditional Chinese literary criticism as beings in their own right. In light of this, Christopher, focusing on *Remarks on Lyrics in the Human World* (*Renjian cihua* 人间词话) by the late Qing aesthetician Wang Guowei, tries to subvert the conventional understanding of Wang’s concept of *wuwo zhi jing* (无我之境) as an anthropocentric idea, and to raise our awareness of the presence of nonhumans.

Aiming to explore *qing-jing* in contemporary Chinese poetry, Chapter 4 “Shared Sensibilities: Human-Environment Relationship in Contemporary Chinese Poetry” first examines *qing* and *jing* respectively and then looks at them again as a pair with a focus on Yu Jian’s verses and the poems that express ecological concern via a strong sense of dissonance, deformity, and disgust for the contemporary environment. In so doing, it tries to explore the types of relationship established between poetic characters and the environment, and analyzes whether contemporary conditions not only destroy the basic connection with nature, but also change the aesthetic consciousness accordingly.

Chapter 5 “The Writing of Inner/Outer World and Eco-poetics in Contemporary Chinese Poetry” focuses on the relationship between human, nature and the environment in post-1990 Chinese poetry scene. It takes Zang Di’s (臧棣) poetic creation for a case study to analyze how his poetic writing moves toward the object-self integration, and how it contributes to and reveals the eco-poetics of contemporary Chinese poetry from three aspects: the general structure of poetic composition, the combination of imagery, and the rhetoric of discourse.

Chapter 6 “Rethinking the Urban Form: Overpopulation, Resource Depletion, and Chinese Cities in Science Fiction” aims to analyze how various urban forms have been envisaged and problematized in recent Chinese science fictions. Based on close readings of Hao Jingfang’s *Folding Beijing* and Liu Cixin’s *Moonlight*, this chapter analyzes the way in which reflexive modernity and liquid modernity can be adopted to examine their reflections on the intricacy of the present ecological and social challenges in their imaginations of the future of Chinese cities.

Chapter 7 “Representing Environmental Issues in Post-1990s Chinese Science Fiction: Technological Imaginary and Ecological Concerns” first combs the technical imaginations that deal with ecological issues, and then examines how these narratives reimagine and reproduce the relationship between nature, humans, and non-humans in these works. It also tries to work out, from an ecocriticism perspective, how humanist and post-humanist ideas can be expressed in these works, and how the corresponding human/non-human conditions, images and identities can be creatively built up. By answering these questions, this chapter sheds light on the agenda and politics of these Chinese literary representations of environmental issues, and highlights the emerging posthumanism in Chinese science fiction in the 1990s.

The second part of this volume revolves around imagined landscapes and real lived spaces.

Chapter 8 “Bridging *Qing* (Emotions) and *Jing* (Natural Realm): Fei Ming’s Eco-Poetics in *Bridge*” studies Fei Ming’s masterpiece *Bridge* (桥), an almost plotless novel characteristic of the interchangeability between landscape and emotions. It focuses on the concept of *jing* as a natural realm and discusses how Fei Ming “bridges” past and present natural landscapes and natural and artificial realms. The love triangle between Xiaolin, Qinzi and Xizhu enables the author to describe the “bridge” between natural and mental landscapes as well as the feelings of these protagonists in a nonanthropocentric way.

Chapter 9 “(Un)natural Landscapes and Can Xue’s Reinterpretation of Tianrenheyi” focuses on the works by Can Xue who has been exploring the interweaved realm of human feelings against the backdrop of a natural yet surreal dreamscape. It maintains that Can Xue, by falling back on both Western and Chinese traditions, develops a new and fascinating pattern of interpreting human relationships with nature, and that *jing* is narrated as the multiple spaces (both real and unreal) which enable the experience of the communion between *qing* and the external world.

Taking Liu Cixin’s science fiction works and A Que’s zombie stories for case study, Chapter 10 “Autopoiesis and Sympoiesis: Imagining Post-Anthropocene in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction” draws on the notion of Chthulucene to discuss the reflections on the Anthropocene and its imagining of the post-Anthropocene in Chinese science fictions. This chapter points out that both Liu Cixin’s and A Que’s works reflect on anthropocentrism from the lens of the non-human others, and that two different directions of imagining a post-Anthropocene era can be identified, namely, autopoiesis and sympoiesis.

Chapter 11 “Feeling the Catastrophe: Affective Ecocriticism in Liu Cixin’s *The Wandering Earth*” conducts a case study of Liu Cixin’s popular novella “The Wandering Earth”, a milestone Chinese Climate Fiction, and discusses, by employing the ecocriticism and the affect theory, how nature and emotions are entangled in this work with emphasis on the part that feelings play in shaping human beings’ reaction to the threat of extinction.

Chapter 12 “Environmental Nostalgia from Idyll to Disillusionment: Zhang Chengzhi’s Inner Mongolia from Short Stories to Essays” concentrates on a contemporary Muslim writer Zhang Chengzhi and his writings. It relies on three of the four “environmental dimensions” identified by Buell, namely, the “physical landscape” represented in the text, the “implicit landscape” of the author, and the presence of intertextual and cultural references underneath the text, to analyze Zhang’s descriptions of the environments. It argues that although Inner Mongolia remains an everlasting *fil rouge* in his works, Zhang’s attitude has changed from appreciation of an idyllic land in his earlier works to, due to the contamination and destruction of the grassland, bitter denunciation after the 1990s, hence a desperate feeling of everlasting abandonment.

Chapter 13 “History, Landscape, and Living Beings in the Work of Wu Ming-yi”, attending to the works by Wu Ming-yi, pays special attention to how landscape and nonhumans, instead of simple metaphors of the human condition, are full-fledged characters and victims just like the humans of the wars and the processes of colonization. It notes that the landscapes under the pen of terroir writers are cultural prior to being imaginary, and that the historical writing of Wu Ming-yi focuses more on the historical and socio-economic evolution of the place than the history of a people.

Chapter 14 “Situationality in Tropical Malaysia: A Literary Sense of Place in Ng Kim-chew’s Fiction” attempts to interweave disparate philosophical systems to analyze Ng Kim-chew’s Sino-ophone short story “Allah’s Will”, and as a thought experiment, it intentionally entangles the configurations of *qing* and *jing* with those of Heideggerian “dwelling” (*buan/bauen*), aiming to site not only the placelessness of Ng’s fiction but also the ecological possibilities of thinking Malaysia’s tropical environment otherwise.

The essays collected in this book are preliminary explorations into the topic of *qing* and *jing* in contemporary Chinese literature. The list of contributors would show that this volume witnesses the joint efforts of international scholars. This book provides one more opportunity for Chinese literary thought to go to the world academic forum, and proves an instructive book for scholars interested in Chinese literature and ecocriticism. In addition, in the context of increasingly prominent environmental problems and the uncertain impact of climate change on human survival in today’s world, the in-depth and extensive discussions in this book will help stimulate people’s exploration into the relationship between man and nature, between man and environment, and between humans and non-humans in literary works, and reflect on the

relationship between humans. However, there are still some points in this volume not accurate enough¹. Despite this, considering the obstacles in cross-language research, it does not affect the rigorousness academic attitude and style of this book.

Notes

¹ For example, the expression “tell the good China story” (see pp.95–96). This expression and some following ones in this essay are cited from *Why Fiction Matters in Contemporary China* by David Der-wei Wang. The original Chinese version is “讲好中国故事” (tell the China story well) rather than “讲中国好故事” (tell the good China story). Although David Der-wei Wang points out that “the Chinese title for the campaign 讲好中国故事 has also been translated as ‘tell the China story well’” (see notes for Chapter 1, p. 178. David Der-wei Wang. *Why Fiction Matters in Contemporary China*. New Hampshire, Brandeis University Press, 2020.), he insists on translating it into “tell the good China story”. These two translations, however, are endowed with quite different implications. The translation of “讲好中国故事” into “tell the China story well” or “tell the China story” has already been widely accepted and can be further confirmed by official media and authorities.

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TRACING THE PATH OF YOGA: THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF INDIAN MIND-BODY DISCIPLINE. By Stuart Ray Sarbacker. NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2021. 451 pp.

In recent times the popularity of Yoga has taken the world by storm, and there has been a rising interest in studying Yoga as a discipline. Stuart Ray Sarbacker, with his book *Tracing the Path of Yoga: The History and Philosophy of Indian Mind-Body Discipline* strives to present a chronological account “on the origin and development of Yoga in its Indian contexts” (3).

Sarbacker acknowledges all the scholars on Yoga and their works which inspired him to write this book. We get a rich oeuvre of literature on Yoga in the acknowledgement section. The book is divided into eight chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. In the introduction, Sarbacker gives an insight into the medieval and modern representations of Yoga.

In the first chapter, ‘Defining Yoga’, Sarbacker addresses the complexity which arises in defining the term because “Yoga . . . has a wide range of meanings, due to its use in a variety of religious and secular contexts” (9). Sarbacker has tried to define “yoga” in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Both the householder and renouncer traditions of Yoga have been analysed. The significance of the *Guru-Śiṣya* (teacher-student) relationship in both *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa* traditions has been emphasised. Sarbacker critiques the power imbalance in this teacher-student relationship which can make the disciples susceptible to abuse. Women's ascetic roles, which were earlier bound to the domestic sphere, “have been adapted to accommodate changing gender roles” (26) in the modern yoga traditions. The concepts of “Yogī, Yoginī, Sādhaka, and Siddha” have been explained. Yoga has been discussed in relation to class, gender and sexuality.

In chapter two, ‘The Indus Civilization and the Vedic Tradition’, the Vedic roots of Yoga is explored. The posture of the figures found in the relics of the Indus Valley Civilization seems to predate yoga posture. The “proto-yoga” Vedic practices of “incantation (*mantra*), asceticism (*tapas*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), celibacy (*brahmacharya*), vow (*vrata*), station (*āśrama*), extract (*soma*), agent (*viṣa*), and herb (*auśadhi*),” (50) is elucidated. The primary focus is on the “proto-yoga” practices and “proto-yogi” figures in the Vedic age.

In chapter three, 'Brāhmaṇical Asceticism and Śramaṇa Traditions', Sarbacker refers to the corresponding links between the *brahmana* and *śramaṇa* traditions. "Vedic concepts such as *tapas*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *brahmacarya*, and the models of Vedic religious specialists such as the *ṛṣi*, *keśin*, and *muni* link Vedic and later Brāhmaṇical and *śramaṇa* ascetic and yogic traditions." (59). The Upaniṣads are a significant part of the literature on Yoga. The various facets of the practice of Yoga in the Upaniṣads have been described meticulously. Sarbacker briefly touches on the evolution of the *śramaṇa* traditions, which opposed the Vedic orthodoxy. The yogic practices in the *śramaṇa* tradition have been discussed succinctly.

In chapter four, 'The Classical Hindu Model of Yoga: Pātañjala Yoga and Aṣṭāṅgayoga' the Indian yoga philosophy of *Yoga Darśana* or "yoga view", also called Pātañjala Yoga, Samkhya-Yoga, has been explained with reference to Patanjali's *Yogasūtra*. The emphasis on the practice of Yoga as a discipline in the form of *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eight-limbed Yoga) "represents the process of liberation as demanding mastery in all spheres of human activity, not just the mind." (99)

Chapter five, 'Hindu Epic, Purāṇic, and Scholastic Representations of Yoga', focuses on the frequent occurrence of "yoga" in the Hindu epic and Purāṇic literature and the Hindu legal (*dharmaśāstra*) and philosophical literature. The exalted status of Yoga and its practitioners have been strongly emphasised in the *Bhagavadgītā* and Hindu *Purāṇa* literature. The introduction of Yoga in the Indian householder tradition has been delineated.

In chapter six, 'Classical Śramaṇa Traditions of Yoga', the significance of Yoga within sectarian and scholastic treatises of the classical *śramaṇa* traditions of Buddhism and Jainism is examined. It focuses on the emergence of Buddhist and Jain literature that places Yoga within an organised system of teachings and practice that outlines the steps leading to spiritual liberation.

In chapter seven, 'The Medieval Transformation of Yoga: Bhakti, Tantra, and Haṭhayoga', the variations in Yoga with respect to the *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa* traditions are propounded. The religious orthodoxy has been contrasted with the emergence of secular devotion (*nirguṇa bhakti*). It gives a general overview of the concepts of the medieval era's *Siddha*, *Mahāsiddha*, and *Haṭhayoga* traditions. The ritualistic practices of Tantra in relation to Hindu and Buddhist traditions have been described.

Chapter eight, 'Modern Yoga Traditions' discusses the contemporary practice of yoga. The modern yoga tradition is represented as a fusion of medieval and cosmopolitan traditions. The popularity of yoga on a global scale has led to the rise of yoga schools. Sarbacker provides a list of noted yoga gurus of contemporary times who have merged the medieval and modern traditions of yoga.

In the conclusion, Sarbacker argues that any study of yoga cannot cover the long and complex history of yoga in its entirety. He re-attempts to define yoga in the Indian context and discusses the various forms of yoga. The rising popularity of yoga with the transformation in Indian culture over the years is addressed.

This book provides a comprehensive approach to the study of yoga as a discipline. Sarbacker presents a well-researched and factual analysis of yoga as a spiritual and philosophical tradition. The way he interconnects the various concepts of yoga in both *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa* traditions is commendable. The text provides a brief insight into the origin and development of Buddhism and Jainism, which will be beneficial for the readers in understanding the *śramaṇa* traditions.

At times Sarbacker disregards the critical lens and presents the information as it is. He briefly states the marginalisation of female yoga practitioners in the medieval era and the lack of female voice in the yogic practices. The role of women and goddesses in the ritualistic practise of Tantra could have been elaborated as it would have strengthened their position. Despite these shortcomings, the book will be an excellent resource to begin with, the study of yoga philosophy.

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POLITICS, ETHICS AND THE SELF: RE-READING GANDHI'S *HIND SWARAJ*. By Rajeev Bhargava (Ed.). London and New York: Routledge, 2022. 353 pp.

Bhargava's edited book is possibly one of the most exhaustive texts to study M K Gandhi's seminal *Hind Swaraj*. The book, apart from its intriguing selection of authors, is significant in its possibilities of reading Gandhi, his philosophy, his language and his politics from diverse and unrelentingly rigorous academic perspectives. If we believe in what the book professes to do, that is assisting "scholars and researchers of peace studies, political philosophy, Indian philosophy, Indian political thought, political sociology and South Asian studies", it must be unusually rich in its academic sincerity, both at presentation and content, and the book safely appears to rise true to its claim. It indeed brings forth a multitude of ideological perspectives and possibilities of analyses; it explores the tensions within philosophy and navigates through the 'ethicality' of thought and language in one singular compilation of critical essays.

The book is a collection of some of the best minds who have taken up Gandhian scholarship, as profession or interest, over the last six decades. The promise of critical opulence may be gathered from the five, different parts that the text is divided into. To brief with a short catalogue of its rather impressing range of engagements, it will be necessary to skim through the textual sections in this book. The first part dives into Gandhian engagement with the question of civilization as a space for weaving worldviews and enquires upon the question of modernity, both as a civilizational project and a techno-temporal construct (under the title "The Truncated Ethic of Modern Civilization"). The second part deals with the problems of imperial expansion and violence ("Empire, Politics and Violence") with the following part looking at the broader issues with psychological and cultural colonisation ("Colonization of Minds"). The fourth part strikingly detours from these contemporary questions of global politics to a more individual quest of identity ("Cultivating Self") and the final section deals with the methods (if there is a concrete one) in reading the *Hind Swaraj* ("How to Read *Hind Swaraj*"). This act of deliberate mentioning the sectional details is mostly to acquaint readers with the exhaustive systems of thought that this book attempts to deal with.

What collects this rather sprawling and at times, baffling oeuvre of Gandhian scholarly works is Gandhi's own writings in the *Hind Swaraj*. Almost attempting to project the intense potential of and the relative interests at hermeneutic exercises, the book has each section fraught with writers who, without always consciously engaging with his counterpart, might have very well pushed open a never ending dialogue/debate with Gandhi and his same set of ethics that still haunts Indian political thought. The Indian civilization and its tryst with modernity have to do both with the imperial experience and a non-theoretical art of resistance. Of course India has witnessed countless philosophers, from Indic to Marxist and Nehruvian, who deal with a set of theoretical programmes to understand history, as it happens under daylight. However, the art of resistance or the question about the ever-eluding distance between *theoria* and *praxis* is perhaps never better talked about but in Gandhi's writings. And this too through a most non-theoretical epistemology. This is exactly what Anthony J Parel reflects on to be "original" in his "The Originality of *Hind Swaraj*". His classifications regarding what concerns the Indian political thought and a 'political thought in India' is instrumental in understanding the niche that Gandhi occupies in international political ethics. His elaborate tracing of what enables Gandhi to offer a decolonised notion of a society, his insistence on the twin notions of 'spiritual welfare' and 'bodily welfare' to chalk out the 'authenticity' of Gandhian thought is significant to begin the discussion in the book itself. Parel deals with the Dharmic thoughts that had formed the base of Gandhi's reflections on life and thus, seeped into his political grammar (Parel mentions the *purusharthas*) is a singular moment of understanding the very basis of Gandhian politics. L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph adds on to the discussion with their "Gandhi and the Debate

about Civilization” as they roll out the historiography of the development in Indian political philosophy. He reads the Orientalists, the Imperialists and the Utilitarians while engaging with the days of Bengal Renaissance as he swims across to the point when, he thinks, the Indian civilizational epistemology reaches its apotheosis in Gandhi’s *nishkarmic* politics.

Ajay Skaria’s text “English Rule without the Englishman” deals extensively with the notions of finitude/infinity, measurability/immeasurability that, as Skaria interestingly portrays, haunts Gandhi’s notion of *Satyagraha*. The notions of ‘sacrifice’, death and its offering to the hostile is surely a question on lines of sovereignty that places Gandhi in a much crucial realm of epistemic engagement. Akeel Bilgami returns to the question of modernity/anti-modernity and the ways to conceptualize radicalism in his “Reflection on Gandhi: Anti-Modernism”. In his text, Bilgami navigates through the currents of Marxist ‘primitive accumulation’, the lines of rationalist-idealist thought and touches upon the paradoxes of ‘reason’ and ‘faith’, thought, experience and superstition while engaging with Gandhi’s moments of crises. Nandkishore Acharya, too, proposes the dissolution of ‘ends’ in favour of contested ‘means’, albeit as a superiorly developed theory along lines of historical causality (in Gandhi calling the “economic” to be the “spiritual”) while reading Gandhi in his “Hind Swaraj: A Historical Necessity”. Similarly in “On Normative Structure of Gandhian Thought”, Satish Jain ‘discovers’ the “organic unity” that he collects from Gandhi’s ‘allegorical’ discourses.

The second part of the text contains Rajmohan Gandhi’s thoughts on the peculiar, almost overdetermined structures of violence and the nuances of *swaraj* and *swarajya*, the ambivalences of a quantitative theory in democratic states and the failures of liberalism that Fred Reinhard Dallmayr studies (in their “Empire and Violence or the Foes in *Hind Swaraj*” and “Political Self Rule: Gandhi and the Future of Democracy” respectively). Reinhard also concentrates on the “heuristic” notion of ‘nationalism that precludes “reification” while radically conceptualising Gandhi’s idea of the “oceanic circles” of societies against hierarchical forms. Uday Mehta’s “Politics and Violence” engages with Skaria’s thought and attempts to understand violence through nuances of the sacred and the retributive while Jeremy Weber understands Gandhi’s sense of “inclusionary and open nationalism” against ideas of hypernational jingoism and chauvinism that looks at the contention of differentially nuanced power structures.

A spectacularly intriguing piece comes from Boaventura de Sousa Santos in her “Learning from the South: Gandhi and Intercultural Translation”. Santos’ piece is perhaps the most nuanced of them all as she takes on to re-define the imperial North and the limitations (and hypocrisies) of the anti-imperial North. This includes her studies on the necessarily derivative, if not symbiotic, status of the Eurocentric discourses (both pro and anti imperial, anti racial and anti-patriarchal knowledge systems) while the author asserts upon the need for radical construction of newer models of thought and language based on ‘real’ expressions of the South. For this, the text refers to instances of the Zapatist movement, the Argentine *piqueteros* and the Gandhian *swaraj* while pointing out the lack of nouns in the otherwise adjective-driven lexicon of the anti-imperial North. It also categorizes three moments of resurgences: “the moment of rebellion”, “the moment of human suffering” and “the moment of victim-aggressor continuity” while relating to Gandhi in each of these phases. Shayal Mayaram, on the contrary, discusses the Indian philosophical notions against the liberal ‘progressive’ notions of the cultural debate (“Beyond Decolonising Knowledge: Revisiting the Swarajya’s in Debate”). To this already suggestive repertoire, Joseph Bara adds onto the question of modern education and establishes a dialogue with Gandhi in his “Gandhi and Political Praxis of Education”.

Keeping in line with the debate of decolonisation in relation to the self, Saheej Hedge elucidates upon a Derridian framework of looking at ‘writing’ and ‘philosophy’ while reading Gandhian idea of the “exemplary” against the “universality” of the Kantian categorical imperative and the operations of determinant and reflective judgements. His attempt is to look at Gandhi in terms of the open metaphor against the probabilities of a metonymic assertion. Gangeya Mukherji’s endeavour is rather brave and inciting where she vents into the interstices of imagination to consider what could

have happened to the Jews if they had really followed the much defamed and often ridiculed notion of *ahimsa satyagraha* in face of a ruthless Nazi power structure. She, surprisingly, establishes loopholes in Gandhi's critics and defends him through a thorough discussion of the Jewish condition while engaging with a commentator like Hannah Arendt ("Gandhi: Calling to Non-Violence Joined by Shy Pragmatism").

Hilal Ahmed in his text, "Afterlife of a Text: *Hind Swaraj* and the Chattisgarh Muktu Morcha" looks into the parallel situations that Gandhi faced in his times and looks for affirmation/negation/problematisation of pragmatics while engaging with at least three case studies with the CMM against industrial-political nexus. The result, as the author finds, is not completely in the negative. While the caste question (the Ambekarite debate) is re-engaged with in Sudhir Chandra's "Gandhi's Twin Fasts", Lucy Nusseibeh and Sari Nusseibeh in their "Sheherezade and *Hind Swaraj*" in a radical digression with the study of pragmatics, scuds back to the effect that non-violence in the form of stories could have against brute and corporeal violence, in a parable from the *Arabian Nights*. Apart from exploring the Indic notion of memory and oral story-telling, this essay looks at how 'force' can be re-defined through non-closed anticipation of a more communicable future. This problem of communicability is taken up in the essay by Tridip Sahrud when he deals with the etymological origins of Gujarati terms and looks at the transformation, both on a linguistic and semantic level, while translating them into English. His essay is extremely significant in understanding the subtleties of semantic progression/elision against the problem of 'language' that not only looks at the Chomskian idea of 'performance' and culture but moves beyond to locate meanings that were "non-existent".

This collection of essays and articles is not just significant to understand Gandhi and his writings alone but almost like its sprawling and exhaustive structure (and content), the book also vindicates the impossibilities of understanding a man to whom theory alone, in itself, was an impossibility. While many of the discussions are not very new to scholars and researchers working on Gandhi, this book might serve a very seminal role in collecting bits and connecting dots towards a failed totality, much like what Gandhi would have loved in his continual iterations and revisions towards his practical but ethical philosophies. The editor has evidently succeeded in presenting a text that might, with lingering doubt, make Gandhi more comprehensible as an entity but will surely claim the locus of confluence for an Indian and an anti-imperial system to resonate across global imagination.

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VERNACULAR ENGLISH: READING THE ANGLOPHONE IN POST COLONIAL INDIA.
By Akshya Saxena. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. 208 pp.

Translation is not an endeavour regarding the inter-communicability of language or semantics alone but a way of both construction and comprehension of one's self, the other and the world. This idea has caught the imagination of modern translation studies where the act of translation is being considered to linger within texts and extra-textual moments of recognition. Of course, it is about re-defining the very foundations of translation practices as what underlies 'expression' and its ethno-cultural dimensions of meaning and politics. In this regard, Akshya Saxena's text is one of the most fascinating studies on translation and extra-translational ways of perception. When I say, 'extra-translational', I also mean 'extra-textual'. In a way, the idea of a text and the act of translation has always been thought to be synonymous in literary practice. However, as Saxena proposes (and also substantiates) in her text, the idea of translation can expand from its common motifs of textuality and the act can pervade spaces that are least perceived or processed. That spatiality can be textually

constructed (and vice versa), is relatively a purchased concept in post-modern academia; however Saxena's argument is not just about spaces or/as texts but concerns hegemony, global politics and the English language. In an epigrammatic usage of a strikingly intriguing book title, it promises four problems; of 'reading', the 'vernacular', the language English and the condition of 'postcoloniality'.

The last problem is mostly based on the functions of 'experience', a condition of temporality and more importantly relates directly to the other problems of language and 'reading'. But underneath all these issues what concerns Saxena (and us) is to seek an exploration with the greater concerns of identity. Saxena takes up this apparent impasse of identity and the post-modern condition in the very introductory section where she positions the current Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and the Dalit youth leader, Rohit Vemula, whose death raised allegation of discrimination and even "institutional murder", at similar yet polar emplacements. As Saxena relates to the peculiar "commonalities" between these figures (both of them belong to the lesser privileged/underprivileged sections of society), she also identifies the divergent approaches that each had towards the English language. Taking a cue from the historical conditions of Indian independence, the author dissects the dissimilar modalities that English as a colonial and a global, hegemonic language has to play in its interaction/confrontation with different ethnicities/castes and communities and argues for its rather variegated and counter-intuitive role in its 'vernacular' experiments.

To assert that Saxena looks at the 'vernacular' phenomena with a great sense of understanding would not be incorrect if one looks at the lengthy and tremendously incisive discussions that she engages with in the first few chapters of her book. Relating to the common dilemma that students of literature and culture studies face in English departments, the author positions English not as the singular common tool for colonisation/globalisation but looks at all less visible, often subtle interactions that the language facilitates on the post-colonial Indian mind. To place her argument on a concrete plane of references, she de-familiarizes our regular conception of language by drawing instances from Anita Dube's fascinating experiment of writing out Franz Kafka's parables by a velvet-covered cheap steel wire that would concentrate the reader/observer's gaze at the language through form and appearance rather than meaning. This "artist's way at giving body to language", Saxena argues, breaks down the sense of 'ubiquity' that accompanies a language like English against global imagination. She cites the likes of Simon Gikhandi, Srinivas Aravamudan, Jonathan Arac, Gaurav Desai and Rey Chow to "account for the multiplicity of the very organizing principles of English". As Saxena mentions, "Both the unmarked neutrality of English as a scholarly medium and its much remarked upon expropriations as a global imperialist language perpetuate the absorptive logic of language." She further refers to the difference in receptions that English gets to be worked upon and claims, "*The variety of (mis)recognitions, accents, and inflections that mark English chart desire and (un)belonging across class, ethnic, gender, and caste differences. This economy of literary, sonic, and visual English across languages and media—its use by people outside of traditional privileges of class, urbanism, and education—diminishes the authority of English as a language of global and colonial power. With such ubiquity, English demands newer ways of reading and conceptualizing and power.*" This statement, in many ways, becomes the guiding motif of the book.

The first chapter of the text locates the introduction of English in the Indian system of education and hence rekindles the historical debates on figures like Thomas Babington Macaulay and Charles Grant while attempting to gauze the peculiarities of Indic languages like Sanskrit and Hindustani, even Urdu and Persian, those that could hardly disentangle themselves from the tentacles of caste and class and communal differences. English, with the patronage of the British colonial government, and hence arrived with a promise of European notions of democracy and equality albeit keeping true to its intimate association with an oppressive colonial bureaucracy. Saxena observes a spectacularly intriguing phenomenon with the idea of English being co-opted as an "associate language" to Hindi in a political independent, post-colonial India. For her study, the author specifically looks into bureaucratic documents that contain "paper truths" and profess that which is "all wrapped up with

showing and all showing wrapped up with knowledge.” Reading from Rashmi Sadana’s *English Heart, Hindi Heartland* (2012), Saxena reads the peculiar experiences of power that Hindi and English exchange in administrative functions of the Indian government when Hindi is ‘transliterated’ into English to “vernacularize” the latter into Indian minds. Saxena observes that this incidence while allowing English to cling onto the upper echelons of the Indian elite population, also endorses its acceptability given its ‘distant’ character to the non-Hindi speaking Indian ethnicities. This distance is ironically the reason that encourages ‘familiarity’ and acceptance of the vernacularized English language as a language of Indians and emerges as one through which the essence of constitutional “Indianness” is communicated to non-Hindi speakers.

In the second chapter, Saxena studies the Dalit question that bears on the caste marks of touchability/untouchability. Referring back to an event in Sahitya Akademi that witnessed exclusive discussions by Dalit writers who write in English; the contradiction of whether to understand them as Dalit artists or as writers who write in English becomes a structural pivot around which this entire chapter is constructed. To the author, these apparently paradoxical questions of identity is about sight, much like English, which is used as a marker of unintelligibility that haunts public spaces of the cosmopolitan environment in India. Drawing from Anupama Rao’s *The Caste Question* (2009) that proclaimed “the history of India’s political modernity is a history of the term Dalit” and the “reorganization of caste under political modernity” illuminates a “constitutive relationship between Dalit emancipation and India democracy.” In discussing writers like Manoranjan Byapari, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, Chandrabhan Prasad (who constructed a temple for Goddess English) and Meena Kandaswamy, Saxena’s chief proposition is that the language English, with all the experiences by Dalit writers (and individuals exposed to English signage in Indian public spaces and literature), nourishes and expresses a discourse that essentially resists dominations by caste, culture, communities and even colonialism. This is not only through translating the non-hierarchical ethos of praxis but also through transforming English as a signifier language and altering the probabilities of signification altogether.

The third chapter, based on the idea of the text and the vernacular possibilities within the Anglophone, studies Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* in an act of Deleuzian “minorizing the major” and locates sections of the texts where English as an instrument of power discourse, belonging not only to the colonial masters but also to the privileged castes and classes in Indian society, encounter moments of disruption, resistance and counter-discourse in its content, form and representation. In this, the character of Bakha (from Anand’s *Untouchable*) is minutely studied by the author where silences and ‘meaningless’ significations affect both the body and the being of the character (interestingly a real life experience of Anand with M K Gandhi regarding this text has also been vividly recollected). Similarly, an episode from Roy’s book *The God of Small Things*, has been analysed to look at the different possibilities of power. In an unsettling section relating to the upper caste Kochamma and a movement that “exposes” identities, just like it exposed privileges (like the sheltered depiction of the car), Roy’s text provides moments of disruption for Saxena, in the otherwise hegemonic language itself and that in the dominant ethos of Indian imagination.

The fourth chapter in the text understands ‘sound’ in the English language as a possible marker for disorienting dominant narratives. In the chapter Saxena broadly studies the Manipuri anti-establishment movements that used English to “throw back” power on the face of the Indian military system that had a controversial record in the state. Saxena studies silences and possibilities of language through the heinous rape of Thangjam Manorama Devi and several other women before massive protests shook the consciousness of the nation and its establishment. Saxena also relates to the question of ‘mother-tongue’ and the language of protest (here English) to read through what hegemony and counter-hegemony meant in formations of meaning and expression through the sounds of the English language. The author intends to suggest that often English is read or expressed without comprehension (that alters dominance that is nascent in the language’s history and politics) and relocates it at a site of resistance.

Finally, Saxena promises to study a couple of films that reveal the ‘ubiquitous’ and often non-meaningful ways to perceive English in India. She takes up Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* and Zoya Akhtar’s *Gully Boy*, both situated in Mumbai’s Dharavi, to study how English became a commonplace site for inspiration and even liberation against the popular belief of elitism. Saxena’s attempt is to argue that Indianness as a qualifier remains much more ‘messianic’ at times when a language like English becomes a language of ambition and social upward mobility.

If read from the perspective of translation politics, Saxena succeeds to offer a relatively deeper and fresher view on the construction of the Anglophone that has lately become a homogenous term for global politics. To her, Anglophone may not relatively be a stable concept of a singular, rather exclusive signifier but might very well be read through ‘provincialising’ English as a language that translates invisible boundaries into moments of survival and liberation. Specifically, talking about the post-colonial Indian scene, as Saxena proposes, the ‘meaninglessness’ of a ‘hegemonic’ language or the sensory perception of a ‘defamiliarized’ English might be a method in studying the language with a greater engagement of social reality and all that is ‘real’ in politics.

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LORE AND VERSE: POEMS ON HISTORY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINA. By Yue Zhang. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022. xv+223 pp.

Yue Zhang’s book is the first English monograph which investigates the *yongshi shi*, the poems on history, which is one of the important subgenres in the history of Chinese literature.

Intense Problem Awareness: The author has a distinct consciousness of questions. From the very beginning, he said in the book: “What were *yongshi shi* in early medieval China? What is the relationship between *yongshi shi* and *huaigu shi* in this period?” (6) Because *yongshi shi* is the key index word in the monograph, its definitions and scope are a must to be investigated and analyzed.

In the following chapters, it is the questions that lead and make a further study of the poems on history. In chapter 2, those questions are how Zuo Si’s poems related and contributed to the *yongshi* subgenre, as well as how they reflected the broader context of Western Jin Dynasty (265–316), etc. The question in Chapter 3 is whether Zuo’s efforts were effective in shaping the prospective memory of his poems. Chapter 4 “focuses on how Tao Yuanming’s reflections in his *yongshi shi* carried on cultural memory in a way that also conveyed his personal perspective on life, moving the *yongshi* subgenre from the political realm into the individual realm” (73). Chapter 5 discusses how the cultural memory of Zhang Liang in Xie Zhan’s *yongshi shi* is presented through Xie’s poems inspired by visiting historical places or relics. Chapter 6 concerns the historical accounts poets chose to be memorized by the world, how poets deal with complex historical records on particular historical figures, and the approaches adopted in appropriating lore from various accounts by the poets who composed the *yongshi shi* in *Wen xuan*, and so forth.

Academic research is designed to find, analyze and solve a question. Yue Zhang has made a thorough and systemic exploration of *yongshi shi* guided by those questions in the case studies of the Poems by Zuo Si, Tao Yuanming, Xie Zhan, and the like.

Where does a question come from? It’s from the contemporary. “All the true history is the contemporary one.” (Croce 2) The truth of history lies in the accordance with the tradition that was invented by contemporary era. The questions of *yongshi shi* resulted from the concerns of the contemporary. It is true with Zuo Si, the poets before him like Ban Gu, and the ones after him such as Jiang Yan and Tao Yuanming.

Explicit Theoretical Framework: The author has a very clear consciousness of theory application. In this book, he applies some theories such as cultural memory, reception aesthetics and intertextuality theory, which have shed light on the interpretation of *yongshi shi*.

Just as the author said, “Cultural memory and reception studies form the macro perspective that guides my research, while intertextuality provides the micro perspective necessary to establish textual connections and cultural continuities between historical sources and individual poems.” (*Lore and Verse* 4) Therefore, those theories mentioned above construct the theoretical frame of this book.

According to Assmann, the cultural memory of a deceased person can be divided into retrospective memory and prospective memory (45). Chapter 2 explores the relationship between retrospective memory and *yongshi shi*. This chapter argues that Zuo Si used historical figures like Zhufu Yan, Zhu Maichen, Chen Ping and Sima Xiangru not only to express his emotions but also to skillfully place himself into the larger context and lineages of exemplary historical figures, which is a new insight into the study of Zuo Si. There were historical figures with high morals, outstanding ability but unknown achievements. Zuo Si expressed his sympathy in his poems and a tradition of *Shibuyu* (a lack of appreciation for scholars) was stressed. “It is usually in society that people acquire their memories.” (Halbwachs 68) Though memory is kind of fiction, it makes the identification possible.

The third chapter traces the prospective memory and reception of Zuo Si’s *yongshi shi* in early medieval China. The identification and utilization result in the canonization of literary works. The imitation of Zuo’s poems by Jiang Yan, the criticism by Liu Xie and Zhong Rong, the reception and reuse of Zuo by Xue Cheng construct a kind of prospective memory of Zuo’s *yongshi shi*. The poets in that era articulated their emotions and thoughts through historical allusions in the poems, criticized contemporary affairs, formed their personality under the influence of Zuo Si.

The *yongshi shi* is not a representation of history, it is the effective-history of the historical figures or their events: the unity of the understanding reality and the event reality. The cultural memory theory in the use of this book shares the same idea as that of philosophical hermeneutics.

With the turn of narrative in the field of history, history is no longer considered to be objective. The post structuralist mentality is embodied in *Lore and Verse*: “The assumption is that the historical elements in *yongshi shi* are an amalgam of historical, unofficial, and anecdotal texts combined in a way that creates a new meaning in poetry.” (11)

Sensible Analytical Tool: *Lore and Verse* has a strong methodological awareness. It adopts several methods such as close reading, intertextuality, textual transmission, and cultural memory, which makes an effective and detailed analysis of *yongshi shi* in early medieval China.

1. Close Reading: In a sense, chapters from the second to the sixth in this book are all case studies based on a close reading of the *yongshi shi* itself. Close reading is one of the main characteristics of this monograph, which includes the translations of *yongshi shi*, some historical backgrounds of them, the intertextual explanations between literature and history. Yue Zhang once in an article said, “The method of close reading of texts helps to appreciate and interpret poetry, and is an important method for Western sinologists to study Chinese poetry.” (On Stephen 53)

The analysis of *yongshi shi* by close reading has some advantages: its conclusion is persuasive, because it was drawn from the case study and text anatomy; the understandings are new, because they are the results of dialogues with former and contemporary scholars; the argument is sound, because it has a solid foundation of texts.

2. Intertextuality: Almost all works are characterized by intertextuality. “A Work exists between and among other texts, through its relations to them.” (Culler 33) Through an intertextual method, poems are linked to one another, forming an echoing and complex network of poetry. The characteristics of intertextuality are more prominent for *yongshi shi*, for it is imbued with historical allusions.

In nearly all the case studies in this monograph, intertextuality could be seen in the analysis of *yongshi shi*. For example, in Chapter 5, the historical context of Xie Zhan was first presented. In the following sections, the close reading of *yongshi shi* is unfolded in the historical lore of Zhang Liang, Liu Bang, Liu Muzhi, Liu Yu, the Xie clan, and so on.

Concluding Remarks: The style of sinologist's study consists of an introduction to the topic, the description of the research object, the translation of an original text, an analysis of it and some theories generalized from it. And this book has the style of sinologist's study.

Lyric is the mainstream of ancient Chinese poetry, and its influence is far-reaching. "The poem articulates what is intently on the mind." (Sun 69) How about the *yongshi shi* in early medieval China? I believe that it's the same, because poems on history are not a reconstruction of history, but a statement of intention, emotion and/or thought. Memory is not historical event, it is essentially a narrative filled with morality and ethics. Such is one of the inspirations from *Lore and Verse*.

Lore and Verse has typological value and significance. As a research paradigm, its theory and methodology could be applied to *yongshi shi* after 589, even other subgenres of poetry.

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ADORNING BODIES: MEANING, EVOLUTION, AND BEAUTY IN HUMANS AND ANIMALS. By Marilyn Johnson. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 224 pp.

When discussing fashion, clothing, or adornment more broadly, conversations in philosophy shift almost inevitably to aesthetics. The obvious aspect about someone's adornment is how it appears to others, but something beyond appearance is also integral. In *Adorning Bodies: Meaning, Evolution, and Beauty in Humans and Animals*, Marilyn Johnson launches her analysis from the philosophy of language in order to delve into the meaning of human adornment. She weaves the discussion around ideas from three key thinkers: Roland Barthes, H. P. Grice, and Charles Darwin. Because appearance remains an important aspect of adornment, Richard Prum and his notion of "biotic aesthetics" serves to connect the discussions about meaning with aesthetics.

To clarify the subject of this book, Johnson explains that it is not limited to fashion or clothing. This book is about "bodily adornment," which includes fashion as well as hats, jewelry, piercings, hairstyles, tattoos, and other accessories. She emphasizes that, for it to be meaningful, adornment needs to be understood as adornment of a body. Adornment carries meaning for a particular body, which can differ on another body. Part of her reason for approaching the topic from philosophy of language can be summarized by her own words. Johnson writes, "I am not making the claim that communication is the *only* thing we do with clothing, but one of the important things, and one that has been neglected." (16) As a legal example further motivating the connection with language, Johnson cites *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* from 1969. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that three students wearing black arm bands to protest the Vietnam War "were protected by the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment." (21) If it had been a mere accessory, then no one would have

objected, even if they thought it was a bad fashion statement. But it was presented to the public as bearing a particular meaning.

From *The Fashion System* by Roland Barthes, Johnson finds her starting point that humans communicate through their clothing about themselves. Adornment communicates that someone is married, serving in the military, going hunting, going to the beach, and much more. The fact that clothing communicates, as these examples show, becomes “the explananda that a theory of communication by bodily adornment ought to account for.” (20) Statements of dress can also reveal other information and have different references, such as time (past, present, future), people (oneself, others, groups), spatial (here or there), and implicit references (I am the Queen [of a particular place]).

Barthes, one of the few philosophers to address fashion, realized that his project failed, which Johnson takes to highlight some issues with structuralism more generally. Barthes focused on identifying the fixed meaning of clothing by examining the pages of two fashion magazines—*Elle* and *Jardin des Modes*—from a one-year period, June 1958 to June 1959. He sought to identify the link between the clothing (the signifier) and the meaning (the signified). Years after publishing this work, he abandoned this theory of fashion and structuralism, and he published his famous article, “The Death of the Author.” Clothing cannot be reduced to mere input and output notions of communication because it is more nuanced and intentional than that model allows. Like language, Johnson points out, the meaning of adornment is not fixed. People embed subjective meaning in their clothing in addition to more recognized symbolic meaning.

Johnson draws on H. P. Grice’s distinction between natural and non-natural meaning to advance her own view about the meanings of adornment. Natural meaning, for example, could include this statement: The man’s white hair means that he is older than thirty. Natural meaning occurs when something happens without someone’s deliberate action, like the regular course of time that turns hair white. And an example of non-natural meaning could include seeing someone in a firefighter’s uniform, which means that person is a firefighter. A salient difference between these two types of meaning rests on non-natural meaning being intentional. One would not accidentally wear a firefighter’s uniform; someone puts on that uniform to indicate their profession or possibly as a costume. But it is deliberate. Upon seeing someone dressed a particular way, we wouldn’t look for a code to decipher the meaning like an answer key. We would seek to understand (or hypothesize) why that person chose to adorn themselves that way, even if we make the wrong conclusions. This strategy of using intentionality to ground meaning offers a more promising approach to understanding bodily adornment. Since even Barthes admitted that his project failed, this book lays out a newer and needed way to approach this topic.

Non-natural meaning includes things that a group or country decided upon, such as particular uniforms or symbols of protest. But it also includes personal meanings, such as wearing a flannel shirt to remember one’s deceased uncle. A recurring question addresses whether animals can create non-natural meaning. Do animals really *intend* to adorn themselves to communicate meaning? In a sense, they do because animals act in ways that imitate natural meaning. Sometimes, however, their choices took years of evolution to become more common for their species. For example, animals emulate the patterning of plants to offer a layer of camouflage to be less noticeable to predators, so the animals that had better camouflage presumably survived longer. The most frequent aspect of choosing for animals revolves around the need and desire for reproduction.

While *The Origins of Species* remains Charles Darwin’s most famous and popular book, focusing on natural selection, his other book, *The Descent of Man*, charts out his ideas about sexual selection. One example that puzzled him, in terms of natural selection, was the peacock. The elaborate tail feathers drained more resources for survival and hindered a quick escape from approaching predators. Darwin concluded that the peahen favored the long, colorful feathers. So, one of Darwin’s more interesting claims was that he believed the way men developed is the result of women’s desire. Some of these adaptations evolve through natural processes, but people also use adornment to directly highlight (or diminish) different aspects of their bodies and to communicate meaning.

The final chapter discusses how aesthetic decisions also guide bodily adornment. Johnson presents Richard Prum's notion of the process of co-evolution—two groups are needed for sexual reproduction, such as “males and females of the same species, or flowers and pollinators of different species.” (164) Prum maintains that sexual selection has led to traits in animals that people find beautiful, but Johnson warns that this fact doesn't illustrate that animals also judge these traits as beautiful. To bring it all together again, she summarizes that language and adornment are both the products of co-evolution, and that co-evolution guides non-natural meaning only. “Those features that are the result of sexual selection are the result of a choice.” (181)

Philosophers have generally ignored clothing, fashion, and adornment, especially as the subject of philosophical analysis. The ghost of dualism—that the body is not so important—might continue to haunt philosophers unbeknownst to them. Or possibly, the continuous shifting of styles and trends makes the moving target of fashion and adornment more difficult to pin down and examine. Whether either of these hold merit, it remains that philosophers have not written much about adornment. Since these discussions are so lacking in philosophy, this book provides a much-needed contribution to the field. But since this book has the added benefit of being highly engaging and insightful, it comes as a very welcome entryway into discussions in the present and also leading philosophers into future avenues of research. Johnson presents astute analysis, while demonstrating each move of the argument with examples from history, popular culture, and science. Taking cues from theories of culture, biology, and psychology, this book maintains its core presence as philosophy, while exemplifying the kind of interdisciplinary research that should guide more academics.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S DRAMA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN THEATRE.
By Mala Renganathan & Arnab Bhattacharya (Eds.). New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2020. 196 pp.

The culture of inquiry built around Rabindranath Tagore's enduring persona of a polymath continues to grow with the present book by Anthem Press. Beginning with the contention that Tagore has been largely hailed as a mystic poet, whereas the transformative power of his drama remains rather understudied, editors Mala Renganathan and Arnab Bhattacharya bring together twelve scholarly articles to study Tagore's dramatic practice as the site of 'his unique and highly original philosophy of life and art'. The first six essays deal with Tagore's drama as text tracing the evolution of his essentially Indian theatre practice. Its imagination begins in the wake of India's call for freedom and materializes through his experimental dance-dramas and comic plays. The next six essays study the plays' popular productions on stage as well as their radical re-productions in popular culture of the celluloid.

Intertwined with Tagore's finest dramatic practice are his ideas about nation, contends Abhijit Sen in 'Rabindranath Tagore: Imagining Nation, Imagining Theatre'. In the great Visionary's notion of a nation, 'swadeshi samaj' (nation as community) with its practice of 'atmasakti' (self-empowerment) traverses the road to freedom. Sen asserts that through plays like *Raktakarabi* and *Tasher Desh* Tagore's vision of a 'swadeshi samaj' and his vision of a 'swadeshi' theatre conjoins at Santiniketan— the microcosmic site of both his imagined community and his essentially Indian theatre-practice. The state/community binary explored in these plays end in a practice of atmasakti by the *samaj*/community, lending them their freedom. In Chandrava Chakravarty's essay 'Place and Space in Tagore's *Raktakarabi* and *Muktadhara*' this distinctly Tagorean space of atmasakti re-

features as comparable, though not identical to Foucauldian concept of self-care, both being means of resisting the oppressive hegemony and a loss of both resulting in loss of individual freedom. The essay highlights the subtle play of symbolism wherein places lose their temporal geographical identities to dissolve into metaphorical spaces of eternal hegemonic conflicts. Even the use of space on stage is not merely an arrangement of props but a thoughtfully executed extension of space symbolism. In fact, in Tagore's conception of a characteristic Indian drama there was little consideration for stage props and scenery. Many later and highly popular productions of his plays that happened on the proscenium against artificial backgrounds seem to miss the point that Tagore thought of a scenery as digression that impeded imaginative capacities of the spectator. In an engaging stance of deconstructive reading, Dattatreya Dutt points out this fallacy. He reads between the lines of Tagore's poetic dialogues and decode their self-sufficiency in locating places and characters, rendering stage directions extraneous. Many of Tagore's symbolic plays also exhibit a concern with development of a higher self which comes by way of experiencing the worldly, briefly known as spiritual realism. Papiya Lahiri studies its manifestation in the hope and zeal of Amal, the dying child protagonist of *Dak Ghar*. Tagore's comedies that have received least attention so far, is comprehensively discussed in two essays. Deboshree Bhattacharjee's study of *Chirakumar Sabha*, a distinctive comedy of errors, focalizes around women as performers and instruments of social change. Arnab Bhattacharya undertakes a comparative reading of short humorous plays to show how Tagore infused a richness and profundity lacking in traditional modes of Sanskrit comedies and existing modes of Bengali comedies. Tagore's highly original practice of dance-drama receives a critical treatment in hands of Deepshikha Ghosh. The intercultural analysis of *Muktadhara* by Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam overviews factors leading to Tagore's development of an intercultural theatre and the aims and scope of this alternative dramaturgy.

Some of the most remarkable essays of the book relate the ways in which Tagore's plays have been reworked for the stage as well as on the big screen. Tagore himself infused a postmodernist subversive sensibility into many of his plays. Seetha Vijaykumar finds an instance of it in *Visarjan*. Here, Tagore condemns the religious practice of animal sacrifice by staging a human sacrifice thus, leading to a ritualistic healing of the audience by way of paradox. Similarly, the mythic princess Chitrangada who unlearns her acquired masculinity and resurrects her submerged femininity to win Arjuna's love, eventually asserts her ungendered selfhood, in hands of Tagore, and becomes one of the earliest artistic renditions of gender fluidity in Indian drama. The door to gender discourse which Tagore opens here takes on multiple hues in its filmic representations of different eras. Debopriya Banerjee through her analysis of popular 1980 family melodrama *Dadar Kirti* and 2012 film *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* suggests 'a strong linkage between the narrative convention and gender and sexual performativity'. While in the former, the on-stage performance of Tagore's *Chitrangada* becomes a means of almost sneaking in non-heteronormative desires in a predominantly heteronormative space, in the latter, through its performance the entire stage is transformed into an intimate space for an expressive enactment of desire and passion. Another postmodernist retelling of a Tagorean play is director Qaushiq Mukherjee's adaptation of *Tasher Desh*. Sneha Kar Chaudhuri undertakes an exhaustive study on instances of subversion within the adaptation which transforms a popular children's play on the theme of freedom and self-discovery into a highly sexualized performance. The essay argues that the degree of 'narrative hybridization' which the text permits testify to presence of an erotic subtext within. Sharmila Majumdar's 'Valmiki Pratibha and Its Afterlife' assess two re-makes of the play *Valmiki Pratibha*; a 2007 stage production by the inmates of a correctional home and a 2012 film 'Muktadhara' based on the very process of producing *Valmiki Pratibha* by the prisoners. With special reference to Nigel Akkara, the inmate who acted as Valmiki both in the stage production and the film, the essay foregrounds the cultural significance of a text's resurrection and its potency in granting an afterlife to both the art and the artist.

The overall impression that the book leaves with, is of Tagore, the modernist thinker who makes women actors perform on stage as men in *Chirakumar Sabha*; introduces concept of gender fluidity

in re-telling the mythical tale of Chitrangada; brings in European style of staging to assist an Indian puppet-style dramatization in *Tasher Desh*; offers stage directions merely through the poetic dialogues of *Raktakarabi*; or in choosing to narrate the life story of Valmiki, the thug instead of Valmiki, the composer of the *Ramayana*, showcases a postmodernist pattern of retelling-of-a-tale way ahead of its times. The myriad-mindedness of Tagore may, at times, seem intimidating and the present compilation shall come in handy therein for, the essays are all well-grounded in either the poet-playwright-performer's artistic ideologies or spiritual philosophies. The very title may seem limiting the scope of the book if one misses out on the contemporary understanding of theatre as a mixed medium inclusive of film and television adaptations. That said, for students and scholars interested in researching Tagore's dramatic oeuvre, particularly its representation in mass media, many of these essays shall make a phenomenal contribution.

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ART CINEMA AND INDIA'S FORGOTTEN FUTURES: FILM AND HISTORY IN THE POSTCOLONY. By Rochona Majumdar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 313 pp.

The history of film in an independent India has been charted in multifarious ways across the seven and a half decades of independence. The title of Rochona Majumdar's book *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures* presents to the readers a paradox. How can the future, which is yet to take place, be forgotten? Majumdar uses this paradoxical phrasing to aware the readers of the past, while simultaneously warning them about the dangers that Indian art cinema is potentially about to face in the next few decades, should the country's attitude towards cinema remains to "not [be] recognized as an industry by the state" (Majumdar: 2021, 4). The author handpicks the films from a range of options, to highlight the dual aspect of postcolonial impact and understanding of Indian cinema in the twenty-first century while dwelling on the categorisation and canonisation of what constitutes 'Indian Art Cinema' in parallel strands. She uses the entourages of Marie Seton and the archives of film societies and institutes to discuss the possibilities that Indian Art Cinema can explore in the days to come.

The book is divided into two parts, each comprising three chapters. The first part entitled The History of Art Cinema starts with the chapter 'Art Cinema: The Indian Career of a Global Category'. Here, Majumdar begins the discussion by admitting that there is no stable definition of Art Cinema in India. She charts the history of talkies in India, noticing how "from 400 in 1931 (the year of the first Indian sound film), the number of permanent cinemas rose to 1265 in 1939 and further to 2090 in 1945" (Majumdar: 2021, 27). The chapter then moves on, through the history of cinema in India, to the stalwart figure of Marie Seton. Using the unique flowchart by Seton that she had used to structurally read *Bicycle Thieves* as a tool, Majumdar highlights how this film was a story of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances, something that Satyajit Ray learned and manifested in his unique way in *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*). Majumdar's identity as a Bengali affects her choice of directors and locale in this book. She mentions Indian Art Cinema but a large section of her book covers cinema from Bengal. She uses frames from the films of Ritwick Ghatak to comment on the hybrid nature of Indian Art Cinema. Even if one assumes that Majumdar's choice is representative in terms of art and aesthetics, geographically her book becomes restricted and favoured by the people of Bengal.

The second chapter 'The "New" Indian Cinema: Journeys of the Art Film' begins with the argument that Satyajit Ray "made the term "Indian New Wave" far more contentious than it would have

been otherwise. His was not the only sceptical voice about the claims of 'new cinema,'". (Majumdar: 2021, 54). Rochona Majumdar goes to great lengths to identify the impact that Ray had on the new wave of cinema, harbouring her favouritism for Ray very subtly in the process. Ray's articles on the 'New Wave' of cinema get more precedence in the initial pages of this chapter than do his films that have contributed significantly to the development and progress of New Wave cinema. Following this, Majumdar charts the rather difficult territory of nomenclature. The question about what to call the rather productive decades of Indian cinema has been covered surreptitiously in the section entitled 'New, Parallel, Middle...'. This chapter also brings to the fore the three waves of new Indian cinema, the 1950s-60s Bengal, 60's Bombay and 70s south India. While dealing with these topics, the importance of the Film Finance Corporation (FCC) had to come up, and this book takes a neutral stand on its effect and affect on the production of cinema in the last half of twentieth century India. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, which despite being a Hindi film, is directed by a Bengali. Like in the previous chapter, here too Majumdar's inclination and selectiveness become visible.

The third and final chapter in the first part of the book, 'Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement' offers a justification of Majumdar's unending devotion towards Calcutta as the hub where the journey of Indian Art Cinema began. She cites the first-ever Film Society in India, which was formed in Calcutta by Satyajit Ray and others, that led to the accumulation of "over a 100,000 film society members across the country" by 1981 (Majumdar: 2021, 92). This chapter tries to trace the history of these film societies and their contribution to developing what Majumdar defines as Indian Art Cinema. This attempt sits very well with the ongoing trend of situating the history of India's art forms post Independence by Postcolonial thinkers and scholars of South East Asia. These film societies started showing films from Europe at regular intervals to their members, allowing them to break free from the stereotypes that had already started to develop in cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and so on. Erum Hafeez in her article 'History and Evolution of Indian Film Industry' writes about how Satyajit Ray "inspired his several colleagues including Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Aravindan, and Rituparna Ghosh who produced globally recognized films in that era and are regarded as the founding fathers of Hindi parallel cinema" (Hafeez 2016, 63), and Majumdar agrees with this notion throughout this chapter, and in the rest of the book as well.

The second part of the book takes a more straightforward turn towards Bengali cinema of the twentieth century. In many ways, the second half of the book presents to the readers a more raw and toothy exploration into cinema as Rochona Majumdar sheds off her pretence to cast light upon 'Indian Art Cinema' and steps into the domain she is most comfortable with: Bengali cinema. She starts the fourth chapter 'Ritwik Ghatak and the Overcoming of History' with the proclamation that "[m]any Bengali film commentators had an entirely negative view of this aspect of his work" (Majumdar: 2021, 128). However, throughout the chapter, she tries and refutes these very negative views of Ghatak's works. She establishes the long-lost relationship that Ghatak had had with the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. In this process, she analyses the role of Ghatak's prose and the genre of prose-poetry that was arguably developed and popularised by Tagore in Bengal. This chapter, too, flows like poetry from one film's analysis to the next, from one genre to another. It is in this chapter that we see Majumdar in her element, structuring the chapter exactly like a well-made film, with a beginning, middle and an end. Majumdar concludes the chapter with a sigh of resignation, and the well-known anecdote of Ghatak's untimely death and lack of appreciation during his lifetime, mostly due to his ideologies. However, this chapter allows the readers to bear witness to a unique perspective on Ghatak from the postcolonial angle.

'Anger and After: History, Political Cinema, and Mrinal Sen' rows the book towards a sublime glory. This penultimate chapter begins with the reference to Sen's (in)famous Calcutta trilogy *Interview* (1970), *Calcutta 71* (1971) and *Padatik* (1973). Majumdar rightly says that these films "arguably marked the first on-screen appearance of the figure of the angry young man in Indian

cinema” (Majumdar: 2021, 161). This argument is significant in the last half of the twentieth century, when the angry young man has already been popularised in England and elsewhere, with the advent of Kitchen Sink drama and the iconic character of Jimmy Porter. What follows in this chapter is a detailed textual analysis of *Calcutta 71*, why the year 1971 was chosen, how it allowed for a political voice to be raised without any propaganda, and so on. The discussion, rich in references, serves as a critical commentary on the working class of Bengal in the nineteen seventies, while simultaneously dwelling on the reception, art and techniques of the film in surreptitious detail. Padatik follows a similar road in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Majumdar attempts to understand the salient features of the angry young man of Sen, who, despite odds, fought tooth and nail to survive in a belligerent world.

Satyajit Ray’s influence on the book and the writer comes to timely fruition in the last chapter of the book, ‘The Untimely Filmmaker: Ray’s City Trilogy and Crisis of Historicism’. Before going into the three films which constitute Ray’s City Trilogy: *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970), *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971), and *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman, 1975), the chapter offers a summary of his earlier works that allows the reader to better understand the position and development of his films over time. This essentially relates films from the past with more contemporary films, an attempt that was also visible in the earlier chapters of this book. It is here that the title of the book stands out, as Ray is rightly shown as a director ahead of his time, bound by the derelictions of money, equipment, technology and mindset. The city of Calcutta becomes a character in these films, as it did in Sen’s trilogy. The contemporary scenario, with the economy taking a hit and the employment reaching an all-time low, is depicted through stark dialogues like “*Ei shohore ki tumi ar ami mile ekta chakri o pabo na?*” (In this damned city, will neither of us get a job?)¹. This chapter, like Ray’s films on Calcutta, is bleak but honest in its representation of the truth about Art Cinema in India.

The book then offers an epilogue which correctly states that there has been a decline in the production of art cinema, and most producers these days are concerned with making a profit rather than supporting quality content. However, Majumdar ends with a positive note, one full of possibilities and opportunities, that would lead India to a new dawn of Art Cinema.

Notes

¹ Translation by the author of this review.

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A FEMINIST MYTHOLOGY. By Chiara Bottici. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 216 pp.

First published as *Per tre miti, forse quattro* (Manni, 2016), Chiara Bottici’s *A Feminist Mythology* (translated by Sveva Scaramuzzi and Claudia Corriero, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) is presented by the author’s *Introduction: a book of books* (pp. 1–14) as a “journey through the myths of femininity [...] *sub specie modernitatis*” (p. 22). If Danto warned against the risks of expressive reduction, inherent in the attempt to restrict philosophy to the sole genre of professional paper¹,

Bottici's *A Feminist Mythology* has above all the merit of highlighting the strength of a creative narration, which has its roots in her previous philosophical research.

Bottici herself underlines the potential of storytelling in the aforementioned *Introduction* where—following the studies of Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler on narrative identity and on the performative character of language, but also the philosophy of narration of Hanna Arendt and Walter Benjamin—she argues that to build a new female narrative identity “we must [...] pass through the patriarchal imagery” (p. 29) that has shaped the vision of women over the centuries. As pointed out Jean-Michel Rabaté in his refined *Preface: a myth and a half* (pp. XI–XX), it is no coincidence that *A Feminist Mythology* begins with the figure of Scheherazade who, according to Benjamin's studies, embodies the function of the narrator *tout-court*.

The potential of creative narration has already been shown by feminist authors such as Monique Wittig in the 1980s, whose works Bottici openly admits to have been inspired by. However, the specificity of *A Feminist Mythology*, as it has been anticipated, is that of working on the myth. From this point of view, the feminist rewriting of classical mythology carried out by Bottici continues in a creative key the work begun by Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, whose first volume's subtitle is *Les faits et les mythes*, if not in 1642 with Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *Les femmes illustres ou Les harangues héroïques*.

A Feminist Mythology is divided into four parts (or “libri” in the Italian version, published by Castelvechi, 2022). The first, entitled *La città degli uomini* and *Two myth and a half* in the English version, begins with an immersion in the ruins of the City of Men, which had produced the myth of Sherazade, Ariadne and Europa. In particular, the “first-person-hysteric-philosophical flux of consciousness” (p. 26)—with which the three heroines of the ancient world remember and at the same time try to subvert their classical narrative identity, to find their own voice and face modernity—alternates with a third person narrator who tells stories of ‘woomanhood’ drawn from everyday life in a realistic and impersonal way, until the voice of the sea itself appears in the last chapter before the *Epilogue*. After having accompanied the memory and the lived experience of Sherazade, Ariadne and Europa as a leitmotiv, as well as the impersonal narration, the sea makes one last female figure swim and dance, and then throws it away. The mythical world, however, is only apparently abandoned. In the second part – the most humorous – of the book, the text takes on a dialogic form, alluding to the democratic illusion that gives life to the mythologem of *The City of Women*. Contrary to Aristophanes, who represents women in power only in the framework of utopia², Bottici reuses the same mythologem fully following the thread (of Ariadne) of his creation. The thread thus reveals itself as a crack in a world which, although overturned, is not free from the “Name of the Father” (p. 110). After an *Intermezzo*, the third book, entitled *Bestiary*, questions the given boundaries of our heteronormative order by outlining a series of transindividual metamorphosis that show the links between the human and animal worlds but also between animate and inanimate forms. The style of magic realism that animates the third book also returns in the last one, *Herbarium*, in which new metamorphoses eradicate all the remaining illusions about the possibility of considering life as a whole in which species coexist separately, without any interconnections.

The first part of *A Feminist Mythology* transfigures the analytical language used by Bottici in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge, 2009) in a creative key, while the subsequent ones are more aligned with her *Manifesto Anarca-Femminista* (Laterza, 2022). Nonetheless, it is difficult to count all the implicit bibliographic references that constitute the skeleton hidden in the body of the book. Moving from prose in first and third person to dialogue and poetry to represent the incessant metamorphosis of the female condition in the struggle to change the patriarchal order, Bottici's multifaceted style itself also evokes numerous literary models. Through the stylistic *varietas*—which distinguishes Italian literature at least from Dante to Leopardi, who with his *Operette Morali* was among the first creators of a modern mythology—the author echoes the ancient and modern tradition of philosophical dialogue, of lyric poetry and mythographic catalogues, as well as the linguistic experiments carried out by contemporary feminist literature.

Similarly, the mythical references brought into play within *A Feminist Mythology* are numerous, as foretold by its original Lacanian title, *Per tre miti, forse quattro*. For example, it is difficult not to think of the myth of Antigone while reading the debate among the women—all with speaking names that make them personified allegories—who refuse to obey “some abstract law” (p. 101) in the third chapter of the second book, entitled *Rehab* in the English version and *Alcoliste Anonime* in the Italian one. Again, in the first part of the book, the woman thrown out by the sea could be identified not only with Europa, but also with Venus, who has lost her mythological name since Baudelaire, having fallen from Olympus into the contemporary capitalist world³. Another myth – this explicitly mentioned – is that of Orpheus and Eurydice, which accompanies the search for oneself carried out by the female figures of the book, as well as the musical progression of the whole narration. Indeed, in the conclusion, entitled *Grand Finale*, a dance of all living beings evokes in a Spinozian key the Dionysian mysteries which were connected to the cult of Orpheus⁴. However, the stylistic and content indeterminacy of *A Feminist Mythology* appears not only to be the result of an epistemological departure from any claim to exhaustiveness, but also a *myse en abyme* of the labyrinthine nature of the myth itself, whose procedural nature had already been highlighted by Bottici in the wake of Blumenberg.

Anyway, considering that almost all the characters represented in the book have speaking names, it is evident how Bottici combines the classical mythical heritage with a modern mythology, forged by her passion for lexicon and etymologies, which she shares with many philosophers and especially with a founding father of mythological science like Vico. Indeed, with in such a densely mythological narration, each narrative element takes on another allegorical meaning: this is the case of Ariadne’s dress or that of the vest that the nameless woman in chapter II of the second book sews to change her own partner besides herself. Semantically connected with the lemma “veil”, the theme of the dress is particularly central within a narrative that aims to strip the classical mythological heritage of its misogynistic character. It is significant that the theme also returns—alongside the shadow of the myth of Eurydice—in the conclusion of the book, in which several vicissitudes related to a mysterious tailor denounce the modern cult of scopophilia and voyeurism.

A feminist mythology therefore has an internal orchestration structured around multiple leitmotifs, functional to recalling the main themes of the book after several chapters. As Rabaté underlines in his *Preface*, “Bottici’s work [...] takes its place in a sequence of Italian authors like Dante, Giordano Bruno, Giambattista Vico or Benedetto Croce, all of whom insist on the power of imagination and its ability to link literature and culture, politic and myth, history and humanities” (p. 15).

Notes

¹ A.C. Danto, *Philosophy as/and/of Literature*, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986, pp. 135–161.

² Cfr. M. Farioli, *Pratiche del potere e idea di Natura: donne e schiavi dalle utopie antiche alla distopia Europa*, in A. Camerotto, F. Pontani, *Utopia (Europa)*, Milano–Udine, Mimesis, 2019, pp. 101–114.

³ Cfr. Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau, *Aphrodite wagnérienne ou la leçon de classicisme*, «Revue de littérature comparée», 1 (2004) 309, pp. 37–54, p. 41.

⁴ Bottici finally returns the myth of Orpheus with all its initiatory character to the feminist struggle, from which it had historically been excluded. Indeed, the preface *Black Orpheus* published by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1948 in Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthology of Negritude*, and the early black activists and early critics who created and studied the philosophy of negritude did not recognize the role played in its formation by the works of early black women activists. Cfr. T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, *Femme negritude. Jane Nardal, La Dépêche africaine, and the Francophone New Negro*, «Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society», II (2000), n. 4, pp. 8–18.

JOURNALS RECEIVED

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The *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (ISSN 0252-8169) is a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, India since 1977. Vishvanatha Kaviraja, most widely known for his masterpiece in aesthetics, *Sahityadarpana* or the “Mirror of Composition”, was a prolific 14th-century Indian poet, scholar, and rhetorician. The Institute was founded by Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla (1942–2020) on 22 August 1977, coinciding with the birth centenary of renowned philosopher, aesthetician, and art historian, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), to promote interdisciplinary studies and research in comparative literature, cultural theory, aesthetics, philosophy and criticism of the arts, art history, and history of ideas. He edited and published the journal for over 40 years as the founding editor.

The journal is committed to comparative and cross-cultural issues in literary understanding and interpretation, aesthetic theories, and conceptual analysis of art. It also publishes special issues on critical theories of current interest. It has published the finest of essays by authors of global renown like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, John Hoppers, John Fisher, Murray Krieger, Martin Bucco, Remo Ceserani, J B Vickery, Menachem Brinker, Milton Snoeyenbos, Mary Wiseman, Ronald Roblin, T R Martland, S C Sengupta, K R S Iyengar, V K Chari, Suresh Raval, S K Saxena, Gordon Epperson, Judith Lochhead, Charles Altieri, Martin Jay, Jonathan Culler, Richard Shusterman, Robert Kraut, T J Diffey, T R Quigley, R B Palmer, Keith Keating, and others. Some of these celebrated essays have been published by Routledge in book format.

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Celebrated scholars of the time like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, Mircea Eliade, Monroe Beardsley, John Hoppers, John Fisher, M H Abrams, John Boulton, and many Indian and Western scholars had been members of its Editorial Board.

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FORTHCOMING SPECIAL ISSUE

Advances in Neuroaesthetics: Narratives and Art as Windows into the Mind and the Brain

Guest Editors: Franziska Hartung (*Newcastle University, UK*)
Buddhika Bellana (*Glendon, York University Toronto, Canada*)

Humans spend an incredible number of their waking hours engaged in narratives and art. Some cognitive (neuro)scientists propose that our minds/brains are optimized to process information in the form of narratives. Some even claim that the way in which we experience our own lives has an inherently narrative character. Similarly, works of art can create and shape culture and elicit powerful emotional responses – responses that may be difficult to elicit otherwise. Why do narratives and art have such a hold over us? What might this affinity we have tell us about the architecture of our minds and brains?

Over the past 15 years, empirical research on literature, poetry, drama, arts, film, and dance have begun to gain a foothold in cognitive neuroscience. As cognitive neuroscientists, we have come to learn that our models of language, memory, and perception fall short of providing satisfactory accounts of our aesthetic experiences with narratives and art. Feeling immersed in a story or song, appreciating the beauty of a painting, or revelling in the lasting impact of a film or play are all essential parts of our psychological experience. This gap between cognitive neuroscience and aesthetics has become a fertile ground for empirical development and discovery.

In this special issue, we pay tribute to the latest advancements in understanding the human mind and brain through engagement with narratives and art, while also elucidating current challenges and laying out plans for future research. We invite submissions from behavioural and neurosciences, as well as current approaches from the humanities and media studies to contribute to an interdisciplinary dialogue. Our goal is to enhance understanding and communication between disciplines in order to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue and collaborations. We welcome contributions in forms of reviews, statement and opinion pieces, evolutionary approaches, as well as conceptual ideas, including theoretical models or proposed mechanisms underlying aesthetic experiences. Articles should be written for a broad academic audience without expert knowledge of a given discipline.